MICROCOSM

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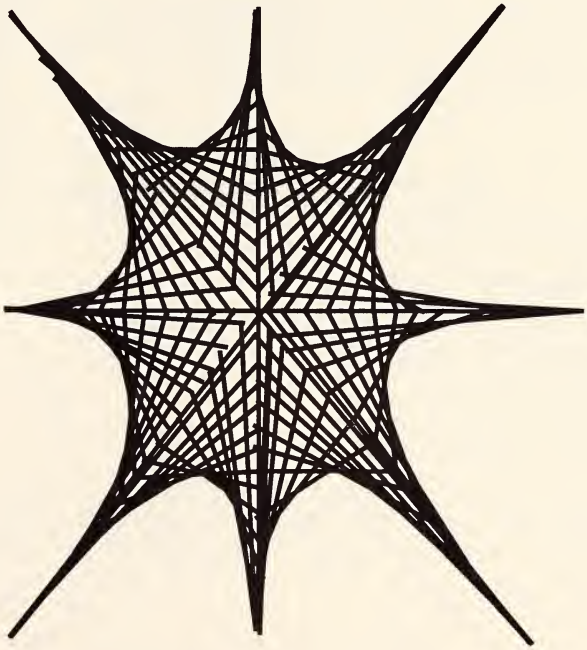
Microcosm



Microcosm...

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Each year the division of Humanities of Copiah-Lincoln Community College holds a literary competition for college and area high school students. Selected college entries are chosen to compete in the Mississippi Community College Creative Writing Association competition and the Southern Literary Festival competition.

The judges for the 1997 competition include the *Microcosm* staff and members of the English faculty. The members of the English faculty are Sharon Alexander, Edna Earle Crews, Nancy Dykes, Reba Gill, Pam Reid, Evelyn Sutton, and Durr Walker, Jr., Chairman of the Division of Humanitites.

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From the Editor...

Greetings from the 1997 *Microcosm* editors and staff. I would like to begin by saying "thank you" to everyone who contributed to this, the 24th *Microcosm*. In a time when most are worried about the local basketball scores or what's going to be on television tonight, it's comforting to know that some still find enjoyment in reading and writing. It's people like you who make it possible for *Microcosm* to succeed year after year and keep the art of writing alive.

There are a lot of people who deserve recognition for their support and contributions. First of all, to the entire *Microcosm* staff. This year's staff has been hard working and dedicated to getting this magazine ready for publication. Even when I didn't feel like looking at another poem or short story, they kept me going. It's that kind of enthusiasm and teamwork that makes *Microcosm* special.

To Mr. Tom Ross for taking care of all the bids and for finding the talented artists who designed the cover and created the illustrations. A special thanks to Ms. Rhonda Posey, my desktop publishing teacher, who taught me how to use all the desktop publishing software used in getting *Microcosm* camera ready.

To Lillie Shannon, our faculty secretary, who always seemed to find time to work our duplicating in with the rest of her work. She never seemed to mind our last-minute demands and frustrating deadlines. Ms. Shannon always kept us a couple of steps ahead no matter what the situation. I would also like to thank Dr. Durr Walker, Chairman of the Division of Humanities, who chauffeured us around the state to all the competitions, helped judge some of our high school entries, and, most importantly, remembered us in his annual budget.

Finally, I would like to thank Mrs. Crews. Without Mrs. Crews' guidance and dedication, *Microcosm* would not be possible. She shared my enthusiasm about *Microcosm* and kept me hopping with new ideas and suggestions for putting this magazine together. Mrs. Crews' dedication to writing and this magazine is remarkable and should not go unrecognized.

I hope that this year's *Microcosm* is one that you will remember for a long time to come. Thanks to you, the reader and to anyone else I might have inadvertently left out for helping make this issue of *Microcosm* a success.

Best Wishes,
Corey Hux
Corey Hux
Co-Editor

Like Diamonds in the Rough

Dr. Phyllis Hayes Lanier
Literary Hall of Fame

In the depths of black amorphous (uncrystallized) carbon with the duration or time, pressure and heat emerges an allotropic form of the element (crystalline). From this geochemical reaction with the skill and creativity of a diamond cutter comes forth from this murky carbon the most precious of all gems: the diamond. I often call my beginning chemistry students "potential diamonds in the rough."

So it is with the spoken and written word. Writing is an art and the art of writing well requires skill, inspiration, time, creativity, desire and support. Great works of art and literature have emerged and stood the duration of time. Stories were to be told and feelings were to be expressed.

In my own personal scientific persona, the aesthetic and poetic side of me has also surfaced as a diamond in the rough or as a caterpillar leaves the cocoon into the butterfly stage. I have always had the intrinsic desire and interest to speak, teach, preach, and write well. Influences and the following experiences have helped me move toward this goal: (1) being reared in a home where correct grammar was a way of life/proper speaking-good spelling, (2) listening to my daddy practice his lay sermons with his inspirational delivery, (3) going to high school library meetings encased with books and more

books, (4) taking my favorite and most enjoyable course in college—speech, and (5) being a pretend author of a chemistry textbook while enrolled in library science.

Collecting and memorizing poetry through the years has been of great value and interest to me. Writings such as "The Creation," "The Old Violin," and of course the Holy Bible gave me quotes and meaning for many speeches.

In college and graduate school there were also numerous research papers, technical science papers, thesis, dissertation, and scientific publications that required correct skills in grammar and writing. This was not enough for me. My interest and love for the arts and literary world has always been a part of my inner self.

To become better and more learned in an area, one must study and be taught. I have studied French, piano, art, humanities abroad (seeing the homelands of great writers and poets), and creative writing. I have "loved" every moment of these courses, especially the creative writing. Through the encouragement of Mrs. Edna Earle Crews and fellow class members, "You can write," and my own need for the therapeutic value of writing during my mother's long and lengthy illness, I pursued creative writing.

We learned to write and analyze poetry and prose, log daily activities, and write sestinas and villanelles. We learned to express our feelings through writing. Feelings that we wanted to share with our readers. I did all of these writings including many revisions to achieve the best form. Some of my poems were "Dignity," "The Tear," "The Mickey Mouse Molecule," and *Dorothy Laura,* a book in progress on my mother's illness.

I am not whole, and I am not complete without my speech and my writings. As the diamond cutter chips away with his tools and skills to create perfection or as the butterfly emerges from the cocoon, I want to shine with beauty and be free as the butterfly in flight to write, to express my feelings and share my legacy with you, my readers.

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Old Man Stan

Holly Hilton

"Who wants more pizza?" Taylor Dees asked. She was trying to break the tough strands of mozzarella off the pie as she scooped it.

"Not me," Keri Drapur answered. "A moment on the lips, a lifetime on the hips."

"What about you, Allie?" Taylor asked her other friend. "You've hardly eaten a crumb all night." Allie Edmonds had been at Taylor's house since school was over and hadn't even asked for food; in Allie's case, that was rare.

"Not hungry," Allie replied. "I had to dissect a frog today, and it's all I can think about."

"Well, that's not all I'm thinking about. The Halloween party at Dannon's is tomorrow night, and Ty didn't ask me. In fact, he asked someone else right in front of me!" Taylor complained. "I guess that I'll just find something else to do."

"Why don't the three of us just do something?" Keri asked. "If you're not coming, Taylor, then I'll just tell Hunter that I am planning to go somewhere with you two. We could go shopping or something."

"Keri, I'd really hate it if you missed a date with your boyfriend just because of me," Taylor said.

"No problem," Keri said convincingly. "He probably won't even realize we missed it."

"Well," Taylor sighed, "what is something fun we could do for Halloween, guys?"

"There's the pumpkin festival!" Allie chirped. She was drawing smiley faces on the pizza box. "Or we could rent the movie, 'Haunted House Massacre.'"

"I don't think so, but speaking of a haunted house, have ya'll ever heard anything about the house near Lane's Pond? Some people from school were talking about it at lunch today. They say that the old man that lived there died about twenty years ago, and he still walks around the yard and through the house on certain nights. He's even been spotted on Halloween, too!"

"What's his name?" inquired Keri. She looked interested.

"Old Man Stan is what they call him," Taylor said. "It can't be a lie because four or five so-called 'reliable' sources are said to have seen him on different nights yet with the same descriptions."

"Really, are you serious?" Allie asked. "That gives me chilly-willies! Hush the nonsense. You can't be serious; no, no. Taylor are you serious?"

"Yep, as a heart attack. What do you guys say we go take a look tomorrow night. It would be the ultimate H-night action. It beats out rolling enemies' yards and especially Dannon's bash!"

"Oh no!" Allie yelped. Her blue eyes widened. "You've got to be mad. What if something bad happens, or what if he's psychic and knows where we live, or . . . I could just see us on the ten o'clock news . . . six o'clock too . . . what if . . ."

"What if you could shut your trap?" Keri said bitterly. "Ghosts don't have the capacity to do that stuff. They don't work that way." She took a long sip of her Dr. Pepper. "Personally, I think it would be hysterical. Let's do it!"

"We could get Dannon's bunch to come along, and we could take plenty of flashlights," Taylor said with enthusiasm.

"And a camera!" Allie chimed in.

"And a camera?" asked Taylor. "And *why*?"

"To take his picture! A real, live ghost!" Allie exclaimed.

"I doubt he will want to enjoy a Kodak moment," Taylor muttered. "Anyway, what do you say we head out about midnight tomorrow?"

"Sounds good to me," the two girls answered almost simultaneously.

The next night the girls traveled down a dusty, winding road until they came to a clearing. The house appeared vacant, and the front porch was crooked as if the house had shifted through time. The screen door was merely hanging by a latch.

"Too bad no one was invited to come with us," Taylor implied sarcastically to Keri. Keri had insisted that Dannon's party need not have the privilege of this kind of fun.

"Oh, give it up!" Keri shot back. "You just want Ty to be there so you can jump in his arms if we see anything."

"Please stop arguing!" said Allie. Her voice was almost in a whisper. "Now that we're here, I wish we'd have gone to Dannon Jacobs' party like the normal people." Taylor just sat in the driver's seat, staring ahead.

"Who shall lead the way?" she asked.

"It was your idea, and you have always been a genuine adventuress," Keri said. Allie already had her head covered.

"O-okay, I-I'll go," Taylor stammered. "But you guys better be tagging totally close behind!"

Taylor got out of her car and made her way for the house. As she reached the steps she turned around, only to find that no one was following. "What's this?" she yelled, mainly out of nervousness. "If no one is coming with me after I brought you all out here, then be that way! Be scared, wimpy babies!" Taylor knew she was also describing herself at this point. "OK," she reminded herself, "go on in and be brave. It's no big deal; there's no such thing as a ghost. You've got to prove to your friends that you are braver than they could ever be just by going into an old house and taking a look around because all this is your fault. You brought it up."

She climbed the brick steps to the abandoned house and almost fell when one of the loose bricks wobbled as she stepped on it. Taylor turned the doorknob and the shrill, squeaking noise it made was enough to send her heart racing. She shined her flashlight into every corner, but all she encountered was furniture and torn curtains. The air was cold, colder than the air outside. There was a picture on the wall and a rocking chair in the corner. "That's strange," she thought. "It's almost as if someone still lives here." She decided to walk through every room in the house because she knew going through only one was no amazing feat and nothing to brag about. Just as she entered the dining room, she heard a door slam.

"Hey you guys! I knew you'd come!" she hollered. She breathed a sigh of

relief. Only there was no answer. Taylor's face grew hot, and the darkness in the room seemed to envelope her as she waited to see what the noise was. Just as she was heading for the door, a light, some type of lantern, flipped on. Taylor saw a man staring at her down the barrel of a shotgun. She froze. Her attempts to scream were useless. Her mouth could not manage to get the sound out.

"No, no," she whispered. "I'll leave you alone; I promise. Just go back to your grave. It's OK; don't kill me. I'm just in high school, and I make pretty good grades, and I promise to tell my mom where I *really* went last weekend, and I have two best friends that are waiting for me outside . . . please, just put the gun down!"

The old man appeared to be in solid form, not at all how she imagined a ghost to look. He wore a blue flannel shirt with overalls and boots that had obviously seen the mud. His face ruddy, the man looked as if he'd lived in the sure; he wasn't pale at all like Taylor expected. It appeared to Taylor that the man was surely alive. He stared down the barrel of the shotgun with dark, deep-set eyes.

"Please, would you put the gun down?" Taylor pleaded, almost choking out the words. A lump rose in her throat, and a tear streamed down her cheek. She was too afraid to move to wipe it away. The old man lowered his gun, but his cold stare could have frozen a blazing fire.

"Go back to my grave?" he asked. "What do you think you're doin' on this property, eh? Trespassin'?" He had a slow southern drawl that relieved Taylor's fears of his harming her.

"I-I'm n-not trespassing," Taylor managed. "I was just driving along down the road that leads here, and my friends were with me, and we decided to come to this house and take a look around to see if anyone lives here. Honestly, I really didn't think anyone would be living here. I was just . . ."

"Trespassin'," the old man finished. "No other way 'round it; that's what you were doin'. As a matter of fact, I think I'll just take care of you right now." He cocked the shotgun and raised it to aim at her. Taylor saw that his finger was about to squeeze the trigger.

"Ghosts can't shoot people," she said. It was all she could think of to say.

"Ghost," the man repeated. He said it as if his feelings were hurt. "First, you tell me to go back to my grave, and now, you're callin' me a ghost?"

"What is your name?" Taylor asked. "Just tell me your name."

"Stan McKay," the man stated. He spoke quietly now.

"You're dead! I'm leaving," Taylor squeaked. "This is too wild. See ya'!"

"Wait! Just tell me why you think I'm dead."

"OK, let me tell you real quick," Taylor said. She had a feeling this man <u>was</u> really dead, and her instincts held a sneaking suspicion she could be right. His name was the same as the one her schoolmates mentioned. Yet she did feel awful for calling him outright dead. Sweat dripped off her brow, and her heart started slowing down a bit. She was almost calm enough to smile at the old man or being. Or whatever it was.

"Tell me why you think I'm dead," Stan repeated.

"Well, my friends and I, we . . . heard that you were, um, dead. And I believed it. But ya' know what? I don't even care anymore. I gotta be honest with you; I

guess I was actually trespassing."

The man neared the window that faced where Taylor's red Mazda sat. He peeped out.

"No! Don't!" Taylor shrieked. "They'll see you!"

"Look," Taylor began, "I really didn't think I would end up conversing with you, but now that I am, I have to ask you—you're really not like dead or anything?"

"What do you think? Would you be talking with me if I were?"

Taylor looked about the room, searching for an answer. The room was clean, but it had an eeriness about it that made Taylor's spine tingle. She wondered why the old man did not have normal electricity.

"Am I dead?" the man said slowly. He spoke as if he were actually pondering the question himself, trying to find an explanation for his presence. His brown eyes gleamed in the light of the lantern. Then the man became silent for a while; the pause gave Taylor goosebumps. Her fear was returning.

"You shouldn't always believe what you hear," Stan finally said.

"Well, then I guess I have my answer!" Taylor said cheerfully. "I guess maybe we can talk another time. Catcha later!"

"Yeah, yeah kid. See ya 'round," he drawled. "But remember, don't ever come trespassin' again on my property!"

"Of course not, how thoughtless of me," Taylor laughed. "Now that I know the truth, I'll leave you alone. And I'll tell everyone else to leave you alone. Hope you have a nice Halloween!" Taylor walked swiftly to the door and sprinted across the yard to her car. The crisp October air felt good as she took a deep breath. She hopped into her car, panting.

"Taylor!" Allie exclaimed. "You made it! What's up there?"

"Yeah, you took a year! We thought Old Man Stan gotcha!" Keri said hurriedly.

"It's all bogus," Taylor answered. "He's alive. Everything we have heard is garbage. He's an old man living in seclusion that wants peace and quiet. We all owe him that. He never died. But just the same, I shouldn't tell you guys anything since you blew me off in this!"

"So there's no Ghost of Lane's Pond?" Keri asked disappointed.

"Nope, just an elderly man," Taylor said. She could never tell her friends what really happened. Inside she felt the remains of stinging fear, but she remained calm on the outside. The man could have killed her!

"I guess we won't have any awesome stories to tell our folks," Allie mumbled.

Taylor cranked up her car and the girls drove off down the road. Taylor had a strange feeling about the whole ordeal. However, she didn't know exactly why.

Inside the house at Lane's Pond, Stan McKay sat awhile before chuckling to himself. "Don't always believe everything you hear," he repeated from his conversation with Taylor Dees. "But, young lady, do believe some things." The old man floated out of the back door and dissipated into the cool thin air.

Scholarship Award, Simpson Academy

My Grandfather

Caroline Bryant

My grandfather has taught me everything dealing with animals, hard work, and money. Helping people is what he enjoys doing. He has a wonderful personality, and he is fun to be around. However, the one trait that enhances my grandfather's personality the most is his imagination.

For as long as I can remember, Granddaddy has had big ideas to make big bucks; however, his plans never seemed to work. One instance was when he decided to raise rat terrier dogs. Kenny, a good friend of his, gave Granddaddy the female dog, and he kept the male one. Supposedly, the plan was to breed the two dogs and sell the puppies. Since Kenny gave Granddaddy the female dog, and he owned the male dog, he naturally wanted a free puppy out of the litter. Figuring he would have plenty of puppies to sell, Granddaddy gladly agreed. Everything was working out great. Granddaddy had spoken to many people about buying a dog. They all seemed interested. Now all that was left to do was wait for the puppies to be born. My grandfather decided to fix a place for the dog to stay until after her puppies were born. Only seven puppies were born. After Kenny had picked out his puppy, six were left. Granddaddy called up his customers to inform them the puppies were here. To his surprise, most of the people had changed their minds. He decided that since there were not as many puppies as he anticipated, he would just keep them instead of giving them away. Eventually, he grew tired of taking care of them. Finally, he just gave them to some of his friends. Needless to say, he made no profit off the dogs, but this did not stop him. Since this episode, he has raised quails and rabbits, but these schemes were also disastrous.

Another way my grandfather is imaginative is seen in the bizarre dreams he experiences. In one dream, he was ruthless gunslinger, who killed his mean grandfather. His grandfather was the devil. The reasoning behind this was that his grandfather would make all of his grandchildren work exceedingly long hours doing back-breaking chores. Another time, Granddaddy dreamed that he was a caveman. He said that the people in the dream were like animals, and it was a strange experience. A fascinating side to my grandfather's dreams is they often come true. Once he dreamed our neighbor had a car accident near an old, decrepit bridge. Surprisingly, a few weeks later, he did. It was exactly like my grandfather's dream. The man believed Granddaddy because he had told him about the dream before the accident happened. That was just one example; however, not all of his dreams come true. He dreamed I was bitten by a dog with rabies. Luckily, I was not, but I was paranoid. Granddaddy, concerningly, told me to stay away from strange, sickly dogs for a while.

Finally, the funniest story about my grandfather is that he thinks he will be the next ten million dollar winner. Every year, he tells me what he plans to do with the money he is going to win. He never mentions the sweepstakes until he starts getting letters saying that he is in the final stage. When a sweepstakes letter arrives, he

automatically assumes that he is going to be the winner. The company makes the letters sound so hopeful. Granddaddy will call me and will ask what color my daddy's seal is. Then, he'll proceed to tell me that he has a pink seal, and he can win up to eleven million dollars. Trying to tell him everyone gets a pink seal is pointless because he starts telling me that this time they asked for directions to his house. I go along with him, even though I know that he will not win.

People possess many different traits. These traits are what make us each unique in our own way. This world would be unbearable if we were all just alike. Thanks to my grandfather, I never worry about being bored. Because of his ideas about making it big, his strange and unusual dreams, and his infatuation with winning the sweepstakes, I never have a dull moment when he is around. My grandfather's personality is enhanced greatly by his vivid imagination.

Scholarship Award, Copiah Academy

Illustrator: Celeste Jones

A Lazy Summer Day

Ceejaye Sneddon

As I step out of my car, the icy January wind instantly bites at my face. What is it about this rainy, dreary weather that makes the warm days of June seem years away? I race across the parking lot with the bitter cold chasing me all the way to the door of the school. I cannot help but wonder where I would be on a lazy summer day.

After a good night's rest, I wake up on my own, fully rested. The breeze from my ceiling fan tempts me to pull the covers up and stay in bed. The bright sun pouring in through the window seems more inviting. I somewhat reluctantly overcome the temptation to snooze a little longer, get out of bed, and head outside.

The cool water of the swimming pool tickles my toes as it washes up on the top step. I am pleased to find the temperature is perfect. I decide to spread my towel out and enjoy the warmth of the sun before entering the water. The scent of coconut from my suntan oil makes me dream of being on a Hawaiian island relaxing in a big white hammock under a palm tree in the shade. My fantasy is interrupted when a familiar song comes on the radio. It brings back memories from the adventures I have had with friends in the previous summers.

The sweat begins to form on my forehead. I am unable to take anymore. I climb onto the end of the diving board and get ready to plunge into the cool water. I reach the shallow end and emerge feeling revitalized. I struggle to get on a raft, ready to endure some more rays.

Once again my peacefulness is interrupted. I wrestle my way to the side, not wanting to get off the raft. I stretch my arm as far as I can and successfully reach the phone. After a few minutes of conversation, my plans are set for the evening. I make my way to the steps, take a look at my watch, and decide to take a lunch break.

Leaving the heat to go inside, I feel a little dizzy. Thank goodness a tall glass of lemonade quenches my thirst and relieves me of this feeling. I make myself a ham and cheese sandwich and catch a few minutes of my favorite soap opera. I cannot bear to waste anymore time inside.

With a renewed sense of energy, I am ready to take on the rest of the day in my lawn chair. I drift off for a little while. The sun slowly begins to sink. A gentle breeze picks up my hair and tickles my face. Wishing it could stay this way forever, but knowing that it all ends soon, I gather up my things and go back inside.

I run my water for my bath. As I climb in the tub, twinges of pain almost like the picks of pins let me know that I stayed in the sun a little too long. I pick out a bright orange, sleeveless shirt, my favorite pair of blue jean shorts, and the most comfortable sandals to wear. The sun is now completely gone. The sound of crickets is the first thing I notice as I walk out the door to my car. I roll

down the windows and enjoy the night air as I make my way to my best friend's house. I pull in her driveway. Already I hear laughter and music from the backyard. The aroma from the grill fills the air.

After a fun-filled night with my friends, I am ready to head home. The air conditioning feels wonderful on my blistered face and shoulders. The sun seemed to have taken all my energy. I walk down the hall to my room. After changing clothes I turn out the light and climb into bed. The cold sheets are soothing on my sunburned legs. The breeze from the fan dances over my face, putting me quickly to sleep.

A feeling of warmth flashes through my body, but all too soon, a chill takes its place. The bell rings for class, and I have to return to a busy January day.

Second Place, Copiah Academy

Sampling Life

Walking amongst its sprawling buffet of ever changing
choices
And we say,
"I'll have some of that.
A little more please.
And two of that.
I'll be back."
And we eat
Greedily
Of whatever we find that fills us;
It drips from our tongues like honey.
It runs down our cheeks because we ate of it with such
unearthly gusto.
And it is good,
But that which is not is flung half-mindedly under the table—
The table that hid us from the chest down
Making us all look like ghastly busts.
And being busts wasn't bad;
Was it?
It made less to fill with
Life
So
Through the time that turned first to years then quickly to
lifetimes,
We ate, then discarded;
Discarded
And no one saw
Perhaps blinded by the dimming lights
What was under the table.

Daniel Holloway

Lawrence County High, Scholarship Award, Poetry

The New Kid

Our baseball team never did very much,
We had me and Pee Wee and Earl and Dutch.
And The Oak Street Tigers always got beat
Until the new kid moved in on our street.

The kid moved in with a mitt and a bat
And an official New York Yankee hat.
The new kid plays shortstop or second base
And can outrun us all in any race.

The new kid never muffs a grounder or fly
No matter how hard it's hit or how high.
And the new kid always acts quite polite
Never yelling or spitting or starting a fight.

We were playing the league champs just last week,
They were trying to break our winning streak.
In the last inning the score was one-one,
When the new kid swung and hit a home run.

A few of the kids and their parents say
They don't believe that the new kid should play.
But she's good as me, Dutch, Pee Wee, or Earl,
So we don't care that the new kid's a girl.

Travis D. Cloy

Wesson Attendance Center, Second Place, Poetry

Straight

I tried to let You know,
But things got in the way.
Whenever I tried to face You,
I didn't know what to say.
Everything is so confusing,
I can't seem to get it straight.
I really need to tell You this,
But some say I'm too late.
Do they speak the truth,
Or is it only lies?
At night I lie awake wondering
"Are You listening to my cries?"
As the sun comes up,
I slowly climb out of bed,
Voices of hurt and anger,
Whispering in my head.
I kneel before You now,
Whether or not I'm late.
"Dear Lord, if You are listening,
I'm setting my life straight."

Cassie Maier

Loyd Star High School, Third Place, Poetry

Seagull

Seagull, oh, seagull,
Tell me what you know,
Flying over oceans,
Swooping as you go.

Seagull, oh, seagull,
Tell me what you see,
Endless waves of waters,
Sailing ships at sea?

Seagull, oh, seagull,
Tell me what you hear,
Thundering of the surf,
Rushing far and near?

Seagull, oh, seagull,
Tell me what you dream,
Gliding so gracefully,
You seem so serene.

Amy Brownlee

Wesson Attendance Center, Honorable Mention, Poetry

Hamlet's Metamorphosis

Jennifer Beall

One of the most damaging faults that a person may possess is indecision. When an event that forces one to come to an immediate and urgent decision occurs, this lack of decisiveness can cause many changes to occur in that person. Shakespeare's Hamlet demonstrates that when an indecisive person is forced to come to quick and life-threatening decisions, severe and drastic changes in the person's character may occur.

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, is a man who meticulously calculates his actions. He is a thinking man who is not prone to rash behavior. For example, when Hamlet first sees his father's ghost, he is cautious because he believes that it could possibly be a hoax; however, his desire to find the truth leads him to follow the ghost and hear his story. After learning the circumstances of his father's death, Hamlet does not immediately act to avenge it. He faces an inward battle because he knows that he should make things right, yet he doesn't want to cold-bloodedly kill someone in order to do it. In one of his darkest moments, he cries out, "O cursed spite that ever I was born to set right!"(I.v.210). This is an indication of the agony that he is feeling. After much deliberation, Hamlet decides that he needs further proof of his uncle's guilt to justify the ghost's claim. He achieves this by staging a play that parallels the events leading up to and concerning his father's death.

Along with being a thinker, Hamlet is also an optimist. He believes that events can be altered and that destiny is not pre-determined. One of Hamlet's actions that helps to prove this point is his interception of the letter that orders his execution. Hamlet discovers the letter and changes the contents so that it orders the death of Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, the bearers of the letter, instead of himself. He believes that he has changed the course of fate and altered destiny, however wrong he may be.

The turning point in Hamlet's life, when he undergoes a metamorphosis, is when he becomes convinced of Claudius's guilt and decides that he must kill him. Hamlet begins a search for Claudius that ends in his mother's room. Upon entering the room, Hamlet is once again incensed at the injustice of his father's death and at the treachery of his mother and uncle's incestuous relationship. In his distressed state of mind, he mistakenly kills Polonious, believing him to be Claudius. When Gertrude admonishes him, he replies, "...[it is] almost as bad, good mother, as kill a king and marry with his brother"(III.iv.34). After Claudius discovers Hamlet's dastardly deed, and has Hamlet brought to him for questioning, Hamlet appears lofty and light-hearted about what he has done. Hamlet, at this time, has begun a journey that causes him to become unpredictable and thoughtless.

Hamlet's last realization of importance concerns death. He has come to accept death, and he believes that come what may, things will happen as they should. He shows this when Claudius stages a sword fight between him and Laertes. Hamlet agrees to the challenge, despite Horatio's pleas for him to turn them down. Hamlet's

theory of "come what may" comes into play here when he says, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them though we will"(V.ii.11). He has now decided that things will happen as they are intended, no matter what is done to prevent or change them. He has changed his mind about destiny and is therefore brave in death.

When Hamlet was forced to make a decision about whether or not to avenge his father's death, he had no idea how it could affect him. He changed into a person that was completely opposite of his previous self. This sudden metamorphosis can happen to anyone, anytime, and under any circumstances. Once this happens, the old self ceases to exist, and the new self takes over.

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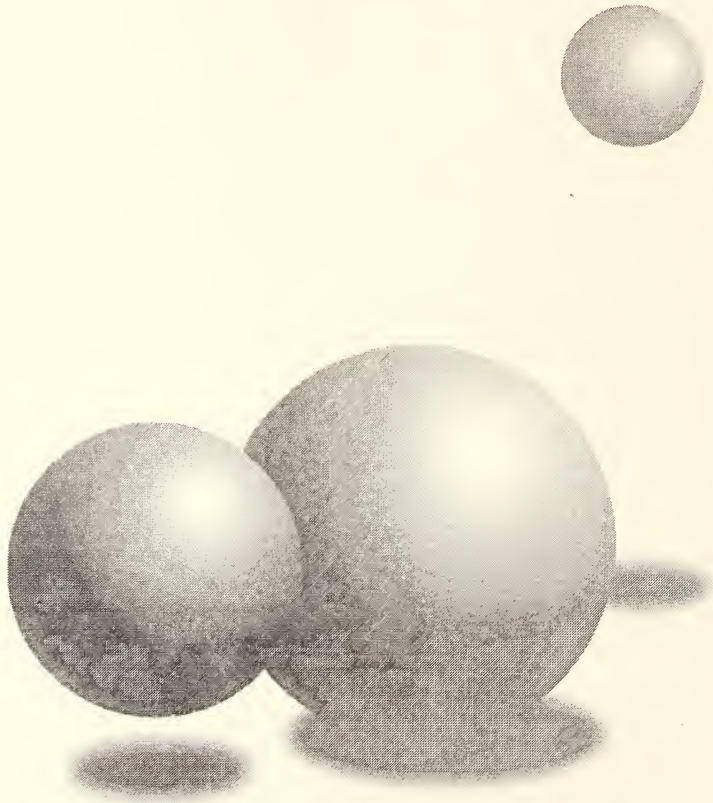

Illustrator: Jerralyn Johnson

Edna's Reach for Freedom

Holly Ferguson

Edna Pontillier tries to grab for many things in her life. She first reaches for a perfect family life, and when she finds that this is not enough, she tries to find love in the arms of other men. When this doesn't work, she attempts to find her freedom. In the end, Edna feels that she cannot bear all that she has placed on her shoulders and ends her existence. In *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin displays how "If you grab for too much, it will slip away from you."

The first thing that Edna reaches for is a storybook romance. When Edna is still a young woman, she finds herself overcome with gifts and admiration from the handsome and charming Leonce Pontillier. Even though her father and her sister object to this romance, Edna decides to marry the man that fate has brought her to. Reality hits Edna after she conceives her two beautiful children. She finds that she is no longer the main focus of Leonce's life and that she is being pushed into a role of motherhood that she refuses to accept. "She was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way," (33) but she does not feel that she could ever be a mother-woman and resents the fact that she is expected to be.

After her storybook marriage falls apart, Edna reaches for romance with Robert Lebrun. He adores her during her stay at Grand Isle, and near the end of the summer she finds that she has feelings for him. The near romance is cut short though when Robert leaves for Mexico. In New Orleans, while Mr. Pontillier and the children are gone, and Edna has still heard nothing of her Robert, she attempts a romance with the Alcee Arobin. She soon finds that although Arobin pleases her, this is not what she wants. Not long after Edna realizes that she cannot be happy with Arobin, Robert reenters her life. She tries to convey her deep feelings for him and tells him that they could have a wonderful life together only to find that not even Robert can understand how she feels. Robert leaves her with only a note that read, "I love you. Goodbye - because I love you" (185).

The fact that no one understands Edna throughout her life is what drives her to gain her freedom. The first instance of Edna's wanting her freedom occurs when she attempts to free herself of her husband and children. She wants to be free to do what she pleases, both in her social and private life; she accomplishes this goal by doing things such as abandoning her normal Tuesday calls and refusing to take orders from her husband. She also leaves her home on Esplanade Street to take up residence at the pigeon house so she won't feel obligated to Leonce anymore. In Edna's last attempt at freedom, after she tries and fails at everything else, she journeys to the beach at Grand Isle. It is there, "at the mercy of the sun," (189) where she slowly swims to her death.

Edna Pontillier perfectly exemplifies a woman who grabs for too much, and lets all that she has slip away from her. Whether it is family, love, or freedom, it cannot be kept forever, nor can it be kept all at the same time.

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Just One of the Boys

Amy Keywood

The changing of the seasons seems to ignite crime in downtown Jackson, Precinct #2. Crimes against persons consisting of murder, rape, and armed robbery skyrocket this time of year, increasing the workload of everyone from the street level to the detective bureau. I missed the constant activity of Precinct #2, but had adapted well to my beat in south Jackson, Precinct #1. Affectionately referred to as "retirement heaven," it was common to transfer lady recruits to this typically quiet district after their probationary period. Women were a novelty in law enforcement, and the administration was still trying to determine what role we would play in the complex manly world of the Jackson Police Department.

On a precinct level, I was simply referred to as "one of the boys." I had effectively patrolled my beat for two years, handling myself with the confidence and commitment I was sworn to upon graduating from the academy, January 1978. I was the only girl on my shift, a small caliber, and well reinforced by the network of men patrolling the adjoining beats. I relied on common sense, adaptability, and my rational split-second responsiveness when needed. I learned to live with my respected friends, Smith & Wesson, who hung by my side and constantly reminded me of the seriousness of my job. I was as committed to the protection of the citizens of Jackson as I was to the childhood dream of becoming a cop.

The evening hours, technically called the "Bravo shift," were my preferred time to work. The bulk of the action in Precinct #1 usually occurred when the sun went down. Prior to sunset, I routinely patrolled the residential areas of Beat #3, deterring house burglaries and securing the minds of the elderly.

Today, the colorful foliage and cooler temperatures stimulated my sense of adventure and caught me wishing for action, when radio silence broke. "One-Bravo-three, possible 10-79, 522 Dorgan Street, ambulance 10-17," barked the monotone dispatcher. Realizing I was right on top of the call, my heart skipped a beat. I rounded the corner, whipped into the driveway, and met a middle-aged woman running from the house toward me. I leaped from my car, struggling to decipher her cries for help, only piecing together "sick daddy had stopped breathing." By radio I reconfirmed that the ambulance was enroute before being hustled into the back bedroom, where the old man was lying. Family members of staggered ages hovered over him desperately awaiting a miracle. It didn't take a mental giant to figure out that the old man was dead but in an attempt to appease the family, I sympathetically checked for vital signs. "Don't you know CPR, officer?" an old woman cried. Through the confusion, my ears strained for the sound of the ambulance. I glanced around the room, scanning the eyes of the family, as if to see what was expected of me. Then knowingly, I leaned over the old man, located his sternum, and began to rhythmically pump his chest - five pumps, ten seconds, no response. Again, five pumps, ten seconds, no response.

"Where is that ambulance?" I mumbled to myself.

Then, a little girl asked, "Miss Police Lady, do you know mouth to mouth?" As I looked down, she tugged on my sleeve to get a response.

Chills ran down my spine at the unsanitary thought of breathing into a dead man's mouth, but the little girl's eyes had pierced by heart. "Lord, give me strength," I silently prayed.

I tilted the old man's head back, closed his nostrils, and blew into his mouth. I watched his chest rise, and much like his family, was temporarily blinded by the finality of his death. The clanging of the equipment carried by the paramedics brought me back to reality. I motioned the family from the room as the medics took over. A few minutes later, a call went out for the coroner, the standard procedure for a natural death.

As we waited for the coroner to arrive, I numbly prepared my offense report. It was brief and emotionally empty with no detail, a statistical report. I had no words to express what had just transpired. I gathered names from the old man's wife, daughter, and the grandchildren, softly spoken between their tears and the memories of his life. The old man was pronounced dead at 4:25 p.m.

I did not sleep well for the next several nights. I struggled to detach myself from the memories of that call reoccurring every time I closed my eyes. I bought a *Jackson Daily News* just to read his obituary. His life was condensed into two small paragraphs, followed by a list of survivors, many names of which I recognized from my offense report. I felt compelled to attend his funeral and stood at a distance. I listened to the quiet sniffles of family and friends as tears marked their faces. I silently wept for them and with them.

From heartache to humor, I laughed and cried my way through four more years of service on the Jackson Police Department. I slid in and out of one predicament after another, watching the bad devour the good. I clung to the bond of my fellow officers as I withdrew from society. Harsh reality brought an early end to my childhood dream leading me to turn in my badge.

My old uniform almost fits my son, now. My police hat hangs lopsided on his head, and his stuffed bear is under arrest and locked in handcuffs. I watch Jay's imagination create as he plays make-believe. I hope this childhood game never turns into his dream.

Illustrator: Brian Goza

Hawthorne's Search for Man in "Young Goodman Brown"

Rebecca Martin

Nathaniel Hawthorne in his search for the essence of man created "Young Goodman Brown," a short story that combines pure allegory with psychological dreams as well as reality. Hawthorne creates an allegorical story centered around the central character's quest to find himself.

Hawthorne's characters are each symbolic by name, dress, and social position. Young Goodman Brown is symbolic of the innocence of youth in the average man. His pretty young wife Faith is identified by the pink ribbons in her hair. It is ironic that Brown associates her with something as slight and insignificant as a ribbon. The color of the ribbons symbolizes the mixture of man's soul — purity of white combined with the wantonness of red. Characters such as Goody Cloyse, Deacon Gookin, and the Minister are leaders of the town of Salem. They are believed to be the most pious people of their community and are revered by all for their righteous ways in life. The Devil, whom Goodman Brown meets while in the woods, resembles Brown, and he carries a staff which resembles a live serpent. The staff represents evil and his appearance stands for the reflection of evil in every man.

> "Young Goodman Brown," like many of Hawthorne's other dream sto ries, takes on the same form and pattern. According to Rita K. Gollin in her book, *Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Truth of Dreams*, "Initially the dreamer undertakes a journey which is also a quest. He is not after power, material profit, or even love the usual objects of a quest. He is impelled by curiosity or a desire for self-fulfillment, and the ultimate direction of each journey is inward. He always feels in control at the start." (134-38)

In the beginning of the story, Faith tries to hold Brown back from his journey, but he insists on going. Why he must go is not stated. We can defer from the story itself as well as ideas of the time that his journey is one of curiosity as well as something not thought to be pure. Brown is leaving his house at sunset for a journey that will take him into the woods. Night time and the woods are believed to be the haunting grounds of witches. For a man to be so pure of heart, he obviously had some questions about himself in order to risk losing his Faith and reputation upon a journey into the woods. This in part shows that the story is a parable because he is on a quest for religious and secular purposes.

While Brown is in the woods he sees many of the upstanding members of his community which confuses him as to what is right and what is wrong. Gollin calls it "A parabolic story of self discovery, of bewilderment only partly dispelled, of night journeys terminated but not completed" (115-16). As Brown heads further into the woods he tries harder to figure out what is going on. When he sees Goody Cloyse he thinks back to his catechism and wonders why she would be in the

woods at night, being so naive as to think that she would not be involved with such a meeting. Brown sees all of what is around him and his perception of the events seem very realistic. However, all of the occurence is just a dream and as he walks further into the woods he is actually going further into his mind. During this evaluation of his soul, he not only approaches the scene of climax in the story, but "the vortex of self knowledge" (Gollin 115-16).

Upon the midnight hour Brown finds himself in the center of the woods at the meeting of the pagans. He believes his wife is there, and on being brought before the altar for the baptismal services, he sees that she is, in fact, there. Brown screams for Faith to hold on to her God and everything vanishes. Brown is left to live in doubt over what really happened. Did he really see the satanic meeting in the woods? Or, did he go to the woods in search of himself and dream the entire episode?

Brown believes that he actually saw everything that went on that night, no matter how unusual and fanciful it seemed. Therefore, Brown loses his belief in mankind, as well as his Faith. Gollin explains his experience:

> The burden of his midnight vision is that evil exists but Brown's mistake is to confuse partial knowledge with absolute truth. His nightmare knowl edge of evil in all men obliterates his ability to believe in human virtue. (128)

Brown loses the joy he once had in life. He loses the self confidence that he had prior to his quest. He lives and dies a miserable man because he could not bring himself to trust anyone, not even himself.

Hawthorne greatly admired man's quest for inner truth and that is probably why he wrote about it so often. He also believed in dreams and their tie to the subconscious. According to Rita K. Gollin, Hawthorne strongly suggests, "...that dreams are a mode of knowledge, a necessary complement to—but not a substitute for—awareness of the waking world" (139). She was right. Brown should have paid attention to his dream and accepted it for what it was rather than acting like a petulant child and scorning the world for fooling him all of these years.

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Rebecca Martin's one-act play "Family Affairs" won honorable mention in the MCCCWA competition.

The Next Genesis

Corey Hux

...And the Earth turned green. After 1,000 years of utter darkness, the dismal burnt grays, blacks, and browns gave way to new life, and the earth was anew. Vegetation sprang forth from the heart of the Earth, and the new waters flowed freely filling the chasms that seven great waters once called their homes. The sun emerged with a radiating brightness, a brightness kept hidden from the shadows of the Earth for one thousand years. A recovering sun blinded so long ago by the dismal acts of man as a flash of heat and light brought about Earth's total destruction. A light allowed once again to shine by the Almighty God as he made the great decision to restore life to this vast planet.

Man—God's own sweet gentle creation, an experiment gone bad—a being once punished by the ravages of flood, received a chance at perfect redemption, many chances, in fact. The rainbow towering across the sky stood as a symbol of God's promise to never repeat those acts. The Cross of Jesus Christ, mankind's second chance. But greed and technology proved to be man's impending doom. The demise of all life as known on Earth fell into the hands of four mortals, saviors in their follower's eyes, but wicked demons in the eyes of the Lord. God did not regret letting man destroy himself. Man was an imperfect design, a flawed creation. Nothing like the plans spread upon the drawing board. Nothing at all.

And so it came that God descended upon the Earth in the hour of rebirth to design his new mankind, a perfect creation. A being which would never be compelled to sin, the only creation. Mankind's fatality rested in the hands of Adam and Eve, the original sinners. God would let no other animals roam free over the earth, so the Devil would have no means of delivering his vile sermon. These new inhabitants of the Earth would have no means of logical thinking, no emotions, no mind. They would be a step down from the former human race.

And thus after the plans were completed, from the soul of Heaven, Leroy was cast down into the swamps of Bogue Chitto. And the Lord looked at what He had created, and He was pleased. And the Lord called this new race "Astron." A perfect species was this Astron. Leroy would need no mate, for he was created the perfect asexual being capable of producing up to sixteen siblings every sixth full moon. Leroy's descendants would be clones, so vanity would not exist.

The Lord gave this race inner abilities to release safe amounts of natural chemicals into their bloodstream giving them a feeling of peace and oneness with their Maker. For this reason, Astrons would have no use for drugs or other intoxicants. They were also built without a respiratory system or mouth, so temptations such as tobacco and super supreme pizzas would be no more.

Astrons were designed without the ability to communicate with one another. The Lord wanted Astrons to only be able to communicate with Him, and they did so telepathically.

God allowed Leroy to wander about the swamplands of Bogue Chitto for seven

days and seven nights to familiarize himself with his new home. Then on the seventh night, God spoke.

"Leroy, listen very carefully. I have given you my Earth and everything in it. You are my new perfect creation, and I have life sustaining instructions for you. If you choose to follow these instructions, you will have everlasting life. If you choose not to, you shall perish. Do you understand, Leroy?"

"Yes, Lord. I understand. What is your will?"

"Leroy, as I said before, you are the sole heir of this planet; it is yours to keep. I have only one rule for you to live by. Do not eat of the sacred turnip patch beside the watermelons of life. I will take care of all other things, but I cannot keep you from the sacred turnips. You must have the will and determination to follow this one rule yourself."

"But, Lord? How can I eat of anything? I have no mouth. I cannot eat without a mouth."

"Leroy, I have made you special. You will eat by holding the food in your hands. Concentrate on it carefully and it will be absorbed into your body filling your cravings of hunger. There are many foods to eat on this vast planet, Leroy. If you obey this one rule, this earth will repay you ten-fold. If you choose to disobey, you shall perish."

"But, Lord, what shall I do for a mate?"

"You need no mate. You have been created in the light of perfection, therefore, you need only Me as a mate. I must go now, Leroy. I have a meeting with the angels."

"But Lord. Lord?"

No reply. Nothing. Leroy sat for a while pondering his first conversation with his Creator. Then his stomach began to growl. He arose to search for sustenance.

The first sign of fruitful vegetation he found was the sacred turnip patch. He looked throughout the patch at the ripe green leaves. He wanted to stop and eat of the turnips, but he remembered God had forbidden him to do so. He kept walking. Past the watermelons of life, through the tomatoes of righteousness, around the butterbeans of immortality, to the sweet potatoes of faith. He stopped in the sweet potato patch to feast.

He grabbed two potatoes. One disappeared, then the other. He felt his stomach begin to fill. He grabbed two more. Just then he heard a small voice intruding into his telepathic communications system, but it wasn't the voice of his Master. He looked down to see a small black creature with a hard shell and two antennae protruding from its head. What man had referred to as a "cockroach."

"Hey, man, or whatever the hell they call you things now. Why you eatin' them nasty potatoes. Go out there and get you a mess of them greens. Them greens are good and fresh."

God looked down upon the Earth and shook His head. He had forgotten that nuclear holocaust had had no effect on cockroaches. So there was, in fact, one creature left for Satan to exhort his wretched doctrine through. God watched the cockroach do his work.

"I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, 'What is this? I thought God

said I was the only creation. So where did this little bastard come from?' Well, I got a little news for you. God's been lying to you. You aren't the only creation, and He knew that. There's a lot of things he's not telling you, and a lot of things he's lying to you about. See, He don't want you to eat of the sacred turnip patch because He plans on creating another being superior to you, and you will be enslaved by this new creation. The turnips are being saved for them because they will give them the power to dominate your race. C'mon, Leroy. I got a little cornbread stashed in a hole. We can feast like kings."

Leroy followed the vile creature back to the sacred turnip patch and pulled up turnips holding the leaves in one hand and the cornbread in the other. Within a matter of seconds the greens and bread were gone. Soaked into his skin. Then a strange feeling came over Leroy. His stomach began to cramp and he fell to the ground in agony, swelled up, and exploded into a million pieces.

The Lord knelt down and wept showering a mist about the Earth as the cockroach ate and laughed. It seemed that Leroy just didn't understand the Lord's reason for keeping him away from the turnips. There would be no other creation to dominate his race, he had just been created highly allergic to turnip greens.

MCCCWA Honorable Mention

Illustrator: Jason Kupiec

Forgivance of Death

Brian Terry

SCENE 1

(Setting: A tomb. A body is brought and placed in it. Five mourners dressed in solid grey sweatsuits are weeping and wailing. Death follows a short distance behind them.)

(Spotlight shines on right side, midway down back curtain. As scene progresses, it slowly arches toward same position on left side.)

Person 1: (To Death) Are you happy now? He's dead! Are you proud of yourself?

Death: But...You don't understand, I...

Person 2: Shut up! You got what you wanted! Isn't that enough? Or do you have to follow along to laugh at us, to make it worse?

Death: NO! That's not it at all!

Person 1: Well what is it then? Just want to make sure you were thorough? Well you were, see! He's dead! Just look at him! Pale, cold; you've never done so thorough a job!

Death: If you would just let me explain...

Person 3: Explain what? You don't have anything to explain. You've done your job!

Death: That's just it! It's my...

Person 4: Oh, just leave!

Death: I...I can't leave.

Person 5: You never get enough, do you?

Death: What are you talking about? If I could bring him back I would.

Person 1: Just stay away from him.You've done enough already.

(Stone is rolled in front of tomb)

(Exeunt all but Death)

Death: Why must they be like that? Don't they understand? It wasn't my choice. It's never my choice. I can't pick and choose who must go. I am told, and I must obey. They say, go here, take the child. I don't want to take the child from its mother. I don't want to have to end its life before it has begun, but I have no choice. I must do as I am told. No one understands. Everyone blames it on me. They think I enjoy it. They think I am evil. They try to find ways to protect themselves from me, to hide. They take potions and say that I no longer have power over them. They try to defeat me, when I am not the enemy. Instead of getting things right with the Master, they spend all of their time and

effort trying to outsmart me. Some of them deny the Master exists, they deny the Evil One exists, and they spend all of their time trying to outdo me, when I'm the only one they can't do anything about. Why must they be so foolish?

(Death lowers his head)
(Spotlight has reached midpoint of left side of back curtain)
(Lights go down momentarily, then come back up.)

SCENE 2
(Enter Persons 6,7,8,&9 weeping, carrying flowers. They kneel, and lay the flowers on the ground in front of the stone.)
Person 6: He was so young. Why, oh why? Such a waste.
Person 7: He never harmed anyone. He never did anything wrong! Why would they do this?
Person 8: How could they do this? How could they bring themselves to it?
Person 6 They are just weak cowards, afraid that he might have threatened their power over us, the incompetent masses.
Person 9: What about his parents? How are they doing?
Person 7: They are taking it well. They knew the situation and were prepared for something like this. At least as prepared as you can be.
Person 8: It must still be terrible, though.
Person 7: Yes. It's taking its toll on them. It's been hard for the entire family. But they're strong. They'll make it through.

(They remain quiet and thoughtfull for a few moments, then they start to leave. But then they notice Death.)

Person 6: What are you doing here?
Death: I...well I...
Person 7: Oh, never mind! I guess you're just admiring your handiwork! Are you proud of it? Is it your masterwork?
Death: NO! No, no, no! Why must you all think that?
Person 8: Isn't it true? Oh, never mind. Just go back to hell, where you came from.

(Exeunt all but Death)

Death: Why do they think I'm from hell? I am not evil! I only do what I am told. Oh, they are so foolish. I don't ravage their souls. I don't give them disease. I don't haunt their dreams. I don't make them hate and lust and kill. I free them from these things. If they would just get things right with the Master then they would welcome me. I do them such a favor. At least some of them. I can see why the ones on the Evil One's list might not be glad to see me. But those that come here to scorn me must surely know better. What I did wasn't evil, was it? Was it? Oh, but what if it was? I was just doing what I was told,

but what if it was a test. What if they just wanted to know if I would do it or not? Oh, oh. I just may go to hell. Oh, I am sure I will. After this, hell is too good for me.

(Death lowers his head)

SCENE 3
(Lights go down again, momentarily, then come back up. Spotlight has reached the left side of the curtain, opposite its starting point.)
(Death continues his speech)

I feel today must be my last in this role. I was given a test, the greatest test that could be given, and I failed it horribly.

(There is a great rumbling sound. The stone rolls away. Tomb is full of fog with a bright spotlight in the back. Man in white robes steps out of the fog.)
(Death drops to his knees, lays his sickle on the ground, and bows.)

Death: Lord, you have risen!
Jesus: Did I not say it would be so?
Death: Oh Lord, forgive me. I cut down your life when you were on the cross. I failed my test and it cost you your life! Forgive me, Lord!
Jesus: There was no test, oh good and faithful servant. You did just as you should. There is nothing to forgive you for.
Death: But Lord, I cut your life with this very sickle. I killed you.
Jesus: No, no.You did nothing wrong. You did exactly what you were supposed to. Now, you have neglected your work for three days. So go, and worry no more. From now on my children will welcome your visits. The saved ones will neither fear nor despise you. They may question why you must come to their loved ones, and in times of grief they may curse you, but when you come to them they will understand. Now go about you work.
Death: Thank you, Lord!

MCCCWA Honorable Mention

Wanting to Go Home

Theda Laird

As I stand here, looking at the marble tombstone before me, reading the name on it one more time, I wonder how little we know what God has in store, or why. Why must our lives on earth seem to go by so fast? I wish we could all be immortal like Duncan McCloud, the guy on the Highlander series. Theda Mae Cupit, I read once more, an unusual name, but I'm glad that I was named after my grandmother. Most memories I have of her are sweet, but I have one memory of her I wish I could extinguish completely out of my head. It's something that I wish she hadn't had to go through, but did.

She was my grandmother, but that's not what I called her. I knew her as Mammaw and what a lady she was, even through her older years. She was my father's mom and anyone could see that they were related. They had several like features including the same stubbornness.

Mam-maw was in her mid-seventies with health problems that seemed to consume her. Really the last several years of her life were plagued with bad health. A short stocky woman she was, with long auburn hair that seemed to touch the ground with every step she would take. Crippling arthritis played havoc on her legs. The replaced plastic kneecaps that she ended up having to get didn't help her mobility. She refused to let anyone help her. She had lived alone for a good while after Paw-paw passed away. Having several children—six to be precise—visiting bringing along their own children kept her from being too lonely. The nurses hired to stay and help take care of her were soon run off by guess who? She lived many years and learned many things, and now being treated as a dependent child really bothered her. She knew in her heart she did need someone there to help, but to her this was totally out of the question.

It was then, that her children, especially her oldest son Earl, decided she had to be put in a nursing home. Not all agreed, but there was nothing else anyone could do. With her now being extremely overweight and unable to get around on her own very well, it was impossible for anyone to handle her alone. Her bladder and bowel illnesses, I feel were caused by the numerous years she had self-medicated with "saltz," as she called it —Epsom salt and water.

She did not want to go to the nursing home, and she let everyone know it too. The house she lived in was all she had, and she didn't want to leave it behind. But in the end she did. She was sent to a place where she didn't want to be, and who really would.

Six months had gone by before I could make myself go to see her there. I'll never forget the picture in my head that first time I did go to visit her. The long ankle length auburn hair...was gone. I'm so glad that Wilfred, my husband and my brother, David, were with me that day. It took all I had to stand there without falling to my knees sobbing. She didn't look anywhere near the way I remembered her. The woman before me had short gray hair and wrinkled skin. I don't

know why, but in my mind I was expecting to find the woman I remembered as a child. How could this be? She knew me though. I was quickly brought to present time by what I saw. I went to her side and kissed her, while running my hand across her short hair.

"Where'd your hair go, Mam-maw?" I asked, trying to smile to keep from crying. I remember her answering me with contempt in her voice.

"Yeah, it's gone, the nurses said it would be easier to manage this way."

We handed her the fruit basket we had brought her. It was full; it even had several packs of spearmint gum in it, something you'd never catch her without. She loved chewing gum and would chew it all at once if you didn't watch her.

I remember Daddy telling me that he didn't think I should go to see Mam-maw because he knew what it would do to me to see her in the condition she was in. He had told me that she had started talking out of her head, saying strange things. I couldn't believe Mam-maw was that way; I refused to believe it. I realized at that moment, she was still the same. Somehow the years just crept up on her without me noticing. Then as I looked at her that day dressed in a long flowered robe, lying in the bed; it hit me, I was right. She's still the same, I just had to look past the wrinkles on her face. Now I see her eyes, still have the same brown twinkle. Then suddenly out of nowhere, the words I heard come out of her mouth brought me out of my thoughts with a jolt.

"Theder," that's what she called me.

"Ya know if you're not good, worms'll get in yur' head and eat it out."

I know I just didn't hear what I thought I did, I said to myself.

"What, Mam-maw? What did you say?" Then out of the blue she asked,

"Theder, you still livin' with Moma? I want some salt meat and biscuits."

"You do? I'll try and bring you some next time, Mam-maw."

Then she went on about her husband, and how he was coming to get her and take her home. I realized she thought her husband was Jimmy Swaggert. With tears in her eyes she asked, "Theder, take me home..."

"I can't, Mam-maw, but Daddy's coming to see you today." I barely got those words out. I couldn't stand seeing her that way.

"Theder, be good or the worms and maggots will come out yur' eyes." That was it, I couldn't handle anymore. All I could do was heave and cry. The trip home was totally quiet. On the way home that day, I tried my best to push what had happened out of my head. My thoughts went back to my childhood when Mam-maw was herself. I wished, I prayed, why can't it be ten or even fifteen years ago instead of now. Wilfred really would've liked Mam-maw the way she used to be. God, I wish he could have met her then. Why do we have to get old. Where has time gone?

I remember the many summers that I would spend with her at her home. The whole front of the house was a closed-in porch. Mam-maw's house was on one corner and the whole town on the other. We'd sit out there on rainy days and watch cars go by, that is, if any did. Harrisonburg, La., was the kind of town that

if you blinked when driving through it, you'd miss it. The town had a post office, two little country stores, one bank, a nursing home where Mam-maw worked until she retired, and a police station with combined jailhouse.

Oh! I forgot one thing. There was an old ice-cream parlor, too. I can still taste the sweet coolness of the cones as we ate them. It was my job to go at least once a day to get us each one. She liked strawberry and I usually got chocolate.

I had so many good times there with her. We ate too much, watched television, and made quilts. I can remember waking up there in the mornings, tiptoeing across the coolness of the flowered tile floor, heading for the kitchen, where I knew she would be. The smell... still so familiar in my mind. It's something I've carried with me through my childhood. It's an unexplainable smell, a smell that can only be found one place: Mam-maw's kitchen. All the meals she made me mix— along with fresh country air and the jars of preserves made in individual baby food jars for us children—and seem to linger staying with me through the years.

Oh man! The biscuits she made, and her always remembering to put two skinny ones, I'd call them, on the pan just for me, knowing I liked them crunchy. Boy, I wish I could go back in time, and if I could I'd be right back in that kitchen with her, helping to roll out the biscuit dough. Thank you, God, for her, my gift you sent. During the times that I stayed there, I can't remember one time I ever got homesick. I'd stay as long as I could, until Moma and Daddy would come and get me. She taught me so many things. I sewed my first quilt by hand, with her there instructing me.

After that visit in the nursing home, I just couldn't go back to see her. And I did not see her until I got the phone call from my Moma telling me she was in the hospital. That call was all it took for me to get in my car and head to Natchez.

We stayed at the hospital; I wouldn't leave. She was in intensive care and wasn't really supposed to have visitors, but the doctors would let me sneak in to see her. I'd stay until they'd run me out for a while. I knew she had the faith and endurance to keep on trying, but also I knew she'd welcome the peace of dying. She was awake a few times that I was in there with her. Tears rolled down my face the first time her eyes opened and she saw me standing over her. More tears flowed when I realized she knew who I was.

"Theder Jr.?"

"Yeah, Mam-maw, it's me. How do you feel?" Really dumb question I thought.

She nodded back at me. I could tell her throat was dry, and she had tubes everywhere. I wet a washcloth and wiped her brow.

"You need anything?"

"Yeah, some salt meat and biscuits."

My emotions...God, I had to control them.

"I'm not going home, am I? I don't want to die."

"Don't talk that way, Mam-maw, you'll be fine. We're gonna make you all better, then you can go home."

I could see a tear roll down her velvet cheek. My legs went numb, but I knew I couldn't break down, for she needed me. She drifted back off to sleep, and the doctors made me go back in the waiting room for a while. We had family members in and out, but my sister and I stayed. We took turns going to see Mam-maw.

The next evening it looked as though she was getting better. Although I did not really want to leave, my Moma talked me into going home. She promised to call me if there was a change, and I reluctantly went home.

I called Moma the next morning and everything was still okay. I went on with the rest of my morning doing house work. I washed clothes, vacuumed, and several other tasks that needed doing. Before I knew it the morning had gone. It was later in the afternoon and I was washing the last of the dishes when the phone rang. Somehow my mind was telling me it was bad news. It was Moma, but she said everything was fine, and that Daddy was just hunting Wilfred. He needed his help to fix something. I knew she was lying, but my mind wouldn't let me believe the worst.

They must've called around and found Wilfred at his daddy's house because a few minutes later he came home. When he walked in a strange feeling came over me. I knew he knew something because he started asking round about questions. Then finally he came out with,

"Have ya heard from anyone this morning?

"Yeah, Daddy wants you to call him, there's something he needs you to help him fix." I knew what was happening, but I didn't want to face it. That's why Moma wouldn't tell me while I was by myself, and I'm glad she didn't even though I knew what she was doing.

I stood there with my back to him while he dialed my parents' number. I heard sounds not words, as if they were talking in code. I tensed when I heard Wilfred's voice.

"Honey, I got some bad ne..." that's all it took, I turned and faced him falling into his arms sobbing. My heart felt as though it was being ripped out of my chest. A thing like this, no matter how prepared you think you are, is so hard. Especially when you and the passing loved one are so close. Mam-maw and I have the same name, we were born in the same month just a few days apart, and I feel tied to her in a special way. I've always felt close to her. At least in the end she was able to finally go home.

I don't think I can relive her funeral. I can still remember every moment of that day so clearly and it gets clearer as I stand here now at her grave. I found a special poem that was read on the day of our farewell to her, and afterward I placed a beautifully framed copy of it in her chariot, along with six deep red roses surrounded by tender white baby's breath that I laid in her opened arms. I placed those things there for Mam-maw to take with her for her final trip home. So Mam-maw, I stand here before you today, to repeat the same words to you, to say, I love you still....

Second Place, Southern Literary Festival

The Historical and Present-day Reality of Ethan Brand's Unpardonable Sin

Jerry Keene

The relentless obsession of one man becomes the theme of Nathaniel Hawthorne's haunting tale, "Ethan Brand." A lime-burner by trade in the hills of Western Massachusetts, Brand passes the lonely hours of the night staring into the intense flames of the kiln, contemplating the theological doctrine of the unpardonable sin. What sin could be so totally evil that even the great God of Heaven could not forgive?

I remember as a child, listening to my father, as he stood in the pulpit and expounded to his congregation the very same subject that had so totally mesmerized Hawthorne's character, Ethan Brand. I remember the many questions I had about this horrible sin. What was it? Could I commit the unpardonable sin? Maybe I already had. That was the most disturbing of all. It seems that literary critic R. P. Blackmur has experienced something of the same when he writes:

> I do not know how it may be now, but when I was a boy the unpardonable sin, the unforgivable sin,--or as I was taught in church, the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost--was a major though intermittent attraction in the short times that seem so long just before sleep. It was a frightening possibility that I might find what it was and how to do it: the frightening thing was that I might then have to do it, as if discovery was actual commission of the sin. The verse in St. Mark (3:19) contained as much potential horror as anything I have ever read...so when I read "Ethan Brand" I knew where he was....(179)

Since that time, I have taken my place in the pulpit of a church like my father before me. And on occasion, I too address the subject and receive the same questions that I, and others like me, pondered so long ago: the very same question that haunts, possesses, and ultimately ruins Ethan Brand.

Driven by his insatiable desire to uncover the deep truth of this frightening possibility, Ethan Brand left his lonely lime kiln on a quest, a quest that would send him the world over in search of the unpardonable sin. For eighteen years he studied and researched the idea that slowly took him over. When his search began, Brand was a kind and gentle man concerned for the well-being of others.

The narrator describes him as

> ...a simple and loving man, watching his fire in the years gone by, and ever musing as it burned. He remembered with what tenderness, with what love and sympathy for mankind, and what pity for human guilt and woe, he had first begun to contemplate those ideas which afterwards became the inspiration of his life; with what reverence he had then looked into the heart of man, viewing it as a temple originally divine, and, however desecrated, still to be held sacred by a brother.... (Hawthorne

796-806)

And yet, so determined was he to uncover the truth that he began to coerce others to give in to their secret temptations and weaknesses, hoping to find within their hearts the ultimate sin. Slowly he began to lose his feeling for humanity. His relentless obsession drove a wedge between him and his fellow man. Manipulating others with a heart of stone, Brand exploited men and women, seeing them only as experiments, not as human beings. As the thought of the unpardonable sin consumed his very soul he in turn, destroyed the souls of others. The narrator asks a haunting question of Ethan Brand, recounting the sad decline of a good and kind man into the fiend he becomes in the end.

> But where was his heart? That indeed had withered, — had contracted, — had hardened, — had perished! It had ceased to partake of the human throb. He had lost his hold on the magnetic chain of humanity. He was no longer a brother-man, opening the chambers or the dungeons of our common nature by the key of holy sympathy, which gave him a right to share in all its secrets; he was now a cold observer, looking on mankind as the subject of his experiment...Thus Ethan Brand became a fiend. (804-805)

After eighteen years of exhaustive research and countless lives destroyed in the process, Ethan Brand returns to the lime kiln he had abandoned so long ago, proudly announcing that he had at last found the unpardonable sin. In his own words he exclaims, "I have looked into many a human heart that was seven times hotter with sinful passions than yonder furnace is with fire. But I found not there what I sought. No, not the Unpardonable Sin!" (800)

In an ironic twist, when Bartram asks him what the great sin is, Brand replies, "It is a sin that grew within my own breast...a sin that grew nowhere else!" (800). What a paradox! Imagine spending eighteen years of relentless study, searching the world over for some illusive truth, only to find it at long last in your own heart! Of this, Paul Elmer More states: Ethan Brand returns to his long-abandoned limekiln after wandering over the world, bringing with him the sense that he has sought and found at last in his own heart the Unpardonable Sin...(318).

What had Ethan Brand found within his own heart that he could not find anywhere else? In the end, he discovers that his heart is totally devoid of human feeling. Again, More elaborates that Brand's Unpardonable Sin is "...the sin of banishing from the breast all those natural, spontaneous emotions in the pursuit of an idea" (318). His endless research and use of fellow human beings as case studies, over time, turn his heart into stone. As Terence Martin puts it: "The definition and focus of the tale are precise; an obsession with one idea has completely vanquished the heart, turning it into marble." (182)

Finding the truth he sought, Ethan Brand's search ends with success but the victory is bitter. After contemplating his many years of study, the lives manipulated in the process, and his own humanity destroyed, Brand resolves to take his own life by leaping into the fires of the kiln he had faithfully tended in a simpler time. Martin remarks here:

When Bartram finds the bones of Ethan Brand in the lime kiln, he decides that:

> 'it is burnt into what looks like special good lime; and, taking all the bones together, my kiln is a half a bushel the richer for him.' By half a bushel, the bones of Ethan Brand contribute to Bartram's well-being. By half a bushel, Ethan Brand serves the mundane purposes of a humanity he has scorned. (182)

A fitting end to such a man, having used mankind to further his own selfish purposes in life, he now serves the needs of the same in death.

Hawthorne's tragic character, Ethan Brand, bears a striking resemblance to a Jewish religious sect in the New Testament known as the Pharisees. The question of the unpardonable sin is a Biblical one. It arises out of one of the many confrontations between the Pharisees and Jesus Christ. Being the recognized religious leaders of the day, the Pharisees were to be spiritual guides for the Jewish populace; however, under the intense scrutiny of Christ, many inconsistencies and heartless practices were brought to light. Recalling Hawthorne's tale, we find that Ethan Brand's heart slowly turned to stone. Over time, he lost all concern for his fellow man, traveling the world over manipulating and using them for his own selfish purposes, condemning their souls in the process. In comparison, listen to the accusation Jesus makes of the Pharisees: "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves" (Matt. 23:15). In the end, their hearts, like that of Ethan Brand, become hard, calloused, and diseased. Devoid of even the most natural emotion of sympathy toward others, Jesus exclaims: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." (Matt. 23:27)

It is of this religious sect that Christ warned of the danger of committing the unpardonable sin. They secretly accuse Jesus of working miracles by the power of the ruler of demons, to which Jesus warns them of the great unforgivable sin, the same sin that so totally possesses Hawthorne's character. Jesus connects the great sin to their accusation of him, yet, their words come from a stony and cold heart, a heart like that of Ethan Brand. Perhaps Hawthorne's character had, in fact, found the unpardonable sin in his own breast. In the Bible we read the words of King David when he says, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise" (Ps. 51:17). Perhaps, the unpardonable sin is a heart so calloused and depraved, that true heartfelt repentance, such as David mentions, is beyond the realm of possibility. In the end, the unforgivable sin is not that it is so terrible that God cannot forgive, but that man's heart, like that of Ethan Brand, becomes so hard over time that he cannot repent.

Brand's obsession is still very much a possibility. Is it not possible for one to become so insensitive toward others that he destroys his own heart and thus, like Brand, loses his grip on "the magnetic chain of humanity?" To so defile the heart that tenderness, contriteness, and repentance become an impossibility is to become a true fiend like Ethan Brand.

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MCCCWA Third Place

Why Fly the Unfriendly Sky?

To chase lofty dreams to stars and beyond?
To escape entanglements on land an on sea?
To seek to explain answers we have not found?
To explore a world where life could be free?

Motivated by curiosity about the unknown,
We search for knowledge to expand our mind,
To design a technology where creativity is shown
And competition that will not leave us behind.

To escape King Minos and the grotesque Minotaur,
Daedalus fashioned Icarus with wings he made of feathers,
Fastened together with string and wax. He soared with power
Toward the sun not heeding time, space, or weather.

Daedalus' warnings dimmed as the sun became brighter.
Plowman and shepherd ceased their work to see
These first aviators fly higher and higher.
Icarus' wings melted, and he fell into the Icarian Sea.

"Icare, Icare, ubi es?" Daedalus cried.
And so did we when Challenger exploded.
(January 28, 1986) Dick, Mike, Judy, El, Ron, Greg, and Christa died.
We could not comprehend it all and our hearts felt loaded.

"They had slipped the bonds of Earth and touched the face of God."
We seek information of how our universe began.
A $2 billion Hubble telescope hovers now to prod
The heavens for answers once again.

Year 2049 brings us full circle to the Daedalus,
A starship propulsion interstellar probe,
That will explore and try to explain space for us.
Galactic travel? Another malfunction? Hope?

I do not know. But one thing I know for certain:
Feathers, steel, interstellar fuel, I will not need,
For uninhibited I will be soaring my way to heaven.
From mazes and complications of this life I will be free!

Erlene Pritchard

To be exhibited at
Photographic Exhibition
In Austin, Texas,
October, 1997- April, 1998

Behind the Crocheted Veil

Susie Agerton

The story opens on the front porch. Three sisters sit in rocking chairs with a Blue Willow coffee service between them. Two sisters are home from the North. The other, drably dressed as only a true country woman can, hovers over the coffee service pouring out comfort.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

SWEE' TEA: The youngest and caregiver to the mother
SWEE' TEA'S FANTASY: The Swee' Tea to be
JESSIE: The oldest sister
SANDY: The middle sister
ROBERTA: Their mother's best friend

The setting is the front porch of a house in a small town in Mississippi.

Swee' Tea, Jessie and Sandy sit in chairs on center stage.
(Roberta enters behind the girls from the house)

Roberta: Well, ladies, I've done all I can do. (*She dries her hands on her apron after pulling it off.*) Your mother, God rest her, could've asked no more.
Swee' Tea: Thank you, Roberta. It meant a lot to us, you staying here after everyone left.
Roberta: It was the least I could do. You, girls, don't stay away so long next time. (*Patting Jessie and Sandy on the shoulder*)
Sandy (*shudders*): Now, Roberta, I told everybody that I wasn't coming back until you all put in some sidewalks. That pavement is just hell on my shoes. Let's not even start on the mud. It just sucks me down. It's no treat that Mississippi mud. (*She pulls out her silver flask and pours Southern Comfort into her coffee.*)
Jessie: I told you to walk on the balls of your feet, sort of up on your toes. It takes practice, but it saves your heels. You don't sink; you just kind of glide gracefully.
Sandy: My feet are too small for graceful, and the rest of me is too damn large.
Roberta: Well, I 'spect I better be going on. I should get home before dark. You all better be moving on with yourselves, too; tomorrow the sun will still come up. It always amazes me, everything still going on and all.
Jessie: I know what you mean, Roberta. I saw the news come on a little while ago and for a moment, just for a moment, I was insulted over the audacity of Tom Brokaw saying something about Iran pushing Kuwait around to war.
Swee' Tea: Mercy, Jesus. How dare he?

Sandy: That's all Southern people ever talk about. War and rumors of war. I'm sick of it. I'll be so glad to get back to the ice and snow. People are too cold to sit and fuss. It isn't healthy, all this anger.

(*Roberta starts to leave again.*)

Jessie: Thank you for staying, Roberta, it was kind of you to extend your friendship for our mother to us. We'll never forget you.
Roberta: Think nothing of it, my child. I would've gone to the ends of the earth for your mother. I reckon I'm going to go on me some kind of vacation. Maybe, I'll go down and visit my sister in Louisiana. Maybe, I'll head out to Las Vegas and do me some...
Sandy: Hold it, Roberta. You know what Mama always said...

(*The three sisters stare at each other for a second.*)
Jessie: Oh yeah, gosh... I'd nearly forgotten... What was it exactly, Swee' Tea?
Swee' Tea: And I quote, "Ladies never fantasize. They put their fancies and dreams behind the crocheted veil of their mind. There they must remain until you fall asleep and are no longer responsible for your actions."
Roberta: God, if I did that I wouldn't have any life at all.
Sandy: Thank God, I ain't no lady! (*She pours more Southern Comfort.*)
Jessie: Ain't it the truth, ain't it the truth! It was just horrible, the way you carried on with the undertaker.
Sandy: I was always a sucker for a suit.
Swee' Tea: It was... it was sacrilegious, that's what! Just totally sacrilegious! At your own mother's funeral.

(*Swee' Tea rocks herself back and forth, hugging herself into a ball.*)

Sandy: I didn't mean any disrespect, honestly, you're just too sensitive. For Christ's sake, I was just asking him if he liked his work. You should've seen him squirm.
Jessie: EVERYBODY watched him squirm, dear sister. That was tacky. (*Jessie blew smoke into the air and waved it away with her hand as if trying to erase the ugly scene from her mind.*)
Roberta (*shaking her head*): I'm going home, ladies. Good-bye, ya'll take care. God bless and keep you. (*Exits.*)

(*Swee' Tea stands, leans on the front porch post stage right.*)

Sandy: That's right Swee' Tea, withdraw. You're always hiding from everybody and everything.
Jessie: She's always waited for life to just jump right on her, snatch her back, and Tah Dah! Instant life.
Swee' Tea: I was thinking, just thinking.

Jessie: Well, Now we're getting somewhere. Tell us. Are you going to be all right after this is over?
Sandy: You've never done anything else, you know. You've always been here taking care of Mama and keeping things going. What are you going to do now?
Jessie: Just leave her alone, Sandy, she's sensitive. She's going to need some time... eight years is a pretty good while.
Sandy: I'm just trying to help the poor thing. Come here, Girl, let me give you some of this. It'll mellow you out... if you'll drink it.
Jessie: Pah-lease! Don't put that thing around, smells like rotten pecans. Couldn't you just drink some kind of cordial or something?

(*The crocheted veil lights up behind Swee' Tea on stage right showing Swee' Tea's bedroom. A woman dressed like Swee' Tea is packing and sits on the bed with her head in her hands. This is Swee' Tea's fantasy self. The veil is between the porch and the bedroom.*)

Swee' Tea (*sitting back in the rocking chair*): You know, I was just thinking... Mama isn't here anymore.
Jessie: Oh Lord! I've been waiting for this... call the doctor... get that prescription out of the drawer in the kitchen.
Swee' Tea: Forget it, Girl. I ain't gone yet. I'm not taking any of that stuff.
Jessie: I'm not going to force it down your throat. I was just trying to make it easier for you, all right?
Swee' Tea: No, I was just understanding, sort of letting it soak in. If I went in there and poured coffee all over Mama's best bedspread and left it there for a week, she wouldn't care...she wouldn't come back. She wouldn't ask me to wash it... she's never coming back no matter what I do. (*Turning to Jessie and Sandy*)
Sandy: No, she's not going to come back. God, I've never been this alone. I left, but when I came home she was here. Now she left, and she's not coming back... she's gone.
Jessie: We are ORPHANS! Old orphans, but orphans.
Sandy: Orphans but never old.
Swee' Tea: Stop it! You're scaring me, and you're warping Sandy for life.
Sandy: You know my nerves can't take it. (*Pouring more Comfort into her cup*) I just felt so bad being out up yonder when she passed on over. I just had a hell of a time getting back here in time for the funeral.
Jessie: You just don't know how lucky you were, being able to be there with Mama through it all, all of those years.
Sandy: Think of all the guilt you're missing out on. All the closeness you two shared... we'll never have that. You held down the fort and we are...
Swee' Tea (*snapping back to reality*): Jealous? You are jealous of the time I spent with Mama? Or are you jealous of the fact that I got to watch her slip through my fingers while her very hands turned transparent in my grasp, disappearing more the tighter I held on? I couldn't hold on tight enough.
Jessie: Quiet, quiet. Ya'll are giving me a headache.

Fantasy: (*behind the crocheted veil*): I'm getting out of here. (*Shaking a gold dress out and holding it to herself, she pats her face and walks behind a modesty screen*) I won't hold down the fort any longer. I'm going to leave.
Jessie (*on the porch*): Put it behind you, Dear. Let it be peaceful tonight. Let's not talk about it anymore.
Swee' Tea: You mean put it behind a crocheted veil, Jessie? Don't you? That's really what you mean.
Jessie: Well, that is one way to put it. Yes, that works for me!
Sandy: I don't think I have one of those crocheted jobs in my mind. You know, if I have one, it's probably a black lacy thing with lots of holes in it so that ever so often one of those racy minute fantasies just kind of zip right through there. Zing! (*shooting a flat hand out*)
Jessie: That would figure. I think my subconscious is probably moth-eaten. No where near black lace, most likely flannel. My luck, I have a flannel curtain to my soul.
Swee' Tea: My whole head is flying around. Everything collides with everything else. I don't know anything any more. My head is in some river, swimming around in some kind of whirlpool. Nothing really makes sense. It's like all the love in the world has died. There is no love left in the world.
Jessie: I know. I don't think anyone will truly know me ever again. Not every fiber of me, the way she did.
Sandy: What happened to the black lace, crocheted veil conversation? Somebody left me...weren't we talking about something dirty?
Swee' Tea: What? Heal her, Lord!
Jessie: Where in the world have you been? Never mind, don't answer. Try to stay with us, Sister.
Sandy: Can't gotta hit the road.
Jessie: Shut up, Sandy.
Sandy: 'Flight 309 to Tennessee. Hold back that areo-plane for me. Ticket maker, make a ticket out... (*singing*)'
Jesse: You don't live in Tennessee. You live in Michigan.
Swee' Tea (*behind the veil*): I am leaving! Don't nobody try to stop me. That's it! That is it! (*Yelling from behind red folded screen*)
Jessie (*on the porch Jessie rocks her chair, gently quiet.*): It is a beautiful evening. Cooling off, I guess. I just adore September. The evenings go on and on... caught somewhere between summer and fall. Well, like us, in ways—adults and children—some of us more than others. (*Leaning toward Sandy.*)
Sandy: I am not childish.
Jessie: I didn't say you were.
Sandy: I think you did.
Swee' Tea: I'll say it. Sandy, you are childish.
Sandy: Thank you, you're right. I ain't through yet.
Jessie: Go ahead, do what you will. Tomorrow I'll be back in my own little corner, in my own little chair.
Sandy: I was trying to tell you, 'Flight 309....'

Swee' Tea: Great Gobs of Grizzlin' cat hair!
Jessie: Swearing doesn't become you, Tea. We have to get back to work.
Sandy: Work...you know, we get out of the house and hit the streets....
Jessie: Don't throw ammunition to the enemy. I am not going to ask you what....
Swee' Tea: Jesus, you are joking!
Jessie: She's joking, Tea, she's joking.
Swee' Tea: I don't understand...all my life, I have been there for you all. I did things for you for Mama so she wouldn't miss you all on top of all the illness. Is any one ever going to be there for me? You just kiss me on the cheek and leave? Is that all there is for me? I want you close to me.
Jessie: Nobody asked you to do it; nobody made you. It was your choice.
Swee' Tea: Was there a choice?
Fantasy (*Behind the veil Swee' Tea throws the drab clothes on the bed.*) I am leaving you all. Not the other way around. ME! I AM LEAVING!
Jessie (*on the porch*): You think Mama grieved herself to death? I hear it's possible.
Sandy: Lord knows she had enough grief. She was the only one left in her family, 'cept Aunt Pete.
Jessie: Don't start that again.
Sandy: Does everyone have an aunt with a mustache?
Jessie: Yes.
Sandy: I wonder if she was, you know...(*wagging her hand*)
Jessie: She had six kids, Sandy. Once and for all time she was a woman. Honestly, the things you come up with.
Sandy: You mean, for Pete's sake.
Jessie: I said what I meant.
Sandy: Mama collected a whole lot of things over the years. It is only right that we should have a few keepsakes. All those beautiful quilts she made. Where are they?
Swee' Tea: I have seen it all.
Jessie: Would you be so kind as to help us gather up a few things?
Swee' Tea: I- told- you, Mama ain't here no more.
Jessie: We went through that already. What are you saying?
Sandy: You make chills on me.
Jessie: Do you want something to calm your nerves?
Sandy (*offering flask*): Here, I have a little left.
Swee' Tea: Thank you, no.
Sandy: She's flipping out.
Swee' Tea: No, I am not. You know, before Mama died she raved in her sleep. I heard things not another living soul knows. She said when she was gone I could make any wish and if she could grant it she would. Sort of like a fairy godmother. She told me I could do as I pleased.
Jessie: Do as you pleased with what?
Swee' Tea: With myself, with everything she left me.
Sandy: So you get everything?

Swee' Tea: Yes. I get everything. I got all the heartache. Yes, everything. You, yourselves gave it to me by not being here.
Jessie: Mama loved us, too.
Sandy: She sure did. I got a letter telling me so.
Swee' Tea: Mama was right, ya'll are shallow.
Jessie: Me, shallow? After all I have been through? She called me shallow?
Swee' Tea: I was being kind. She said ya'll were selfish.
Sandy: Well, if we are selfish what are you?
Swee' Tea: I asked her that. I thought she was in a delirium and would tell me the truth. I always wanted to know what was wrong with me.
Jessie: Well...
Swee' Tea: I don't have to tell you. Mama ain't here no more and I don't have to do anything. Take every material good thing she had, she isn't going to be in them. She is not here anymore. Can I get you some cheesecake?
Sandy: No, I'm watching my figure.
Jessie: I'm hurt and you offer me cheesecake.
Swee' Tea: That's right. It doesn't help, does it? I think you're getting the picture.
Fantasy (*behind the crocheted veil*): Mama said I was solid gold. Did you hear? Did you hear what I said?
(*Turning around looking at herself in awe*) Am I solid gold?
Jessie (*on the porch*): I'm tired to the bone.
Sandy: I think I'm tried. I can't really tell.
Jessie: Swee' Tea, honey, if you have something you need to say, say it.
Sandy: I'm going to bed. Talk. We're listening.
Swee' Tea: All I'm saying is that I guess I'm on my own, now. It's all up to me. I can do anything I choose. And, the first thing I choose is...(*pulls down the veil and slips out exit.*
(*The fantasy Swee' Tea becomes the only Swee' Tea and continues.*)
Fantasy: There is not going to be any crocheted veil between my dreams and me. I am going out in the sun and I am going to shine like gold. It's what Mama would have wanted for us all. But, if you're willing to settle for old dusty things... go ahead, take everything. I'm going out and feel things... every blessed thing. It's mine. Mama gave it to me. I'm going to breathe and work and achieve and cry and laugh and feel joy and victory. Don't you see? She gave us the best thing...life. And I'm taking it, I'm going to revel and roll in it.

THE END

MCCCWA Second Place
Southern Literary Festival

You Are Evil

Coyote Wind.

I can hear you
Feel you in my

Very soul, and
It is a good

Christian soul at
That. So blow and

Go far away
Coyote wind.

When It Was Raining

And I was five
or maybe even four

I would be so sad,
when it rained

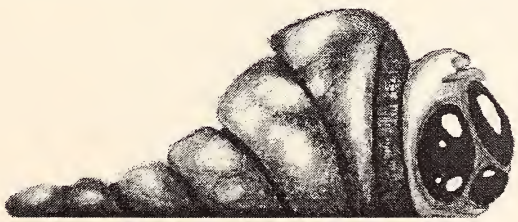
I imagined someone
in the world

Had done something
so bad, it made

God in Heaven
Cry and Cry.

Matthew Lambert

Illustrator: Blake Francis



The Rosenberry Flu

Justin Garrity

The horse in the middle of the house stood there looking at me as I wiped the sweat off my forehead. I had been chasing this mule for the last thirty minutes and I finally had him contained, even if it was in my own da gum house.

This Sunday morning had trouble written all over it. Mama had woken me up today at about 7:30 just like usual, which gave me enough time to shower, eat breakfast, get dressed for church, and feed the chickens and the hogs, not always in that specific order. But two days ago Daddy got me and my two younger brothers the most beautiful horse I had ever laid eyes on and I decided last night I was not going to church and I was going to ride that horse.

So when Mama shrugged on my shoulder this morning, I let out a terrible cough as I weakly put my hands over my face. "Ma, I don't feel good." I whispered as if I had lost my voice. I coughed again as I complained, " My throat hurts, and I couldn't sleep all night long."

Mama was always a sucker for that magic cough. She combed through my hair and suggested, "Well you don't feel like you have any fever, but it sounds like you have the same symptoms of the Rosenberry flu. The Johnson children all caught it this same time last year. Why don't you stay in bed this morning and we'll do some praying tonight before bedtime." As Mama walked back to the kitchen, she told my little brothers to split up my chores. I giggled to myself, as I thought about my pretty horse.

I continued to play sick until I heard the screen door shut, and I knew I had the house all to myself. And I didn't get out of bed till I heard the truck drive completely down the road. When the time was right I sprang to my feet and threw on my favorite shirt and jeans which I had hidden the night before. I pulled on my boots, grabbed my hat, and rushed out the back ready to ride.

I was nearly out of breath, when I reached the horse pen, so I just leaned on the gate as I caught a gasp of air. She was golden brown with two patches of white on her front shoulders and her head. "Cheyenne," I thought I'd name her. Daddy said he got her real cheap from a farmer who was moving to the city. Although she was not a colt, she was still young and me and my brothers were forbidden to ride her until Daddy could break her in. Staring at her I realized the only planning I had done was to get me to the pen, I had not figured out yet how I was going to saddle and break her in forty minutes. Not to mention, shower and get back to bed. But I set out to ride Cheyenne this morning and that's what I was going to do. The horse seemed very gentle when I approached her. She let me stroke her back and forehead. And putting on the saddle was just as easy as arm wrestling my brothers. So I mounted up on her with confidence and eagerness. Everything was working out so well at this point.

I circled her around the pen several times, and she rode gracefully. We kept circling and circling and after about five minutes, I became bored. I wanted to see

what this horse could really do. I eased the gate open to take my show horse out into the big pasture where she could really run. I started to feel like Billy the Kid, up to no good. As we headed out the gate, my blood was pumping fast through my veins. What a rush when I yelled, "Getie up! Horsie!" But that horse must've thought I said, "Get me off! Horsie!" She bucked me and the saddle about six feet in the opposite direction. As I lay face down in the dirt, I realized the consequences I was going to face if I did not catch that horse. I grabbed some rope, possibly thinking that I could lasso her and drag her back to the pen.

After twenty minutes of aimlessly chasing Cheyenne from one end to the other, I was out of breath and ready to give up. So I decided to put up the saddle and act like the horse had broken the gate. Walking back to the house, I could see that in the rush to ride this morning I had left the back door wide open. The horse must have seen it too 'cause she headed in that direction. I thought there was no way my luck was going to get any worse until I saw that horse step foot in my father's house. I knew now that God must be punishing me for lying to my mama and skipping church. I sprinted to the house as I begged forgiveness from God. I swore I would never skip church again and I'd stop looking at all those dirty magazines. The rush I had earlier had turned to anger by the time I reached the back door.

Entering I could see dirt and grass everywhere the horse had been. Mama's kitchen, the dining room, and the hall had all been wrecked. The trail led me to the living room where she stood. I detected a familiar odor: the pen. Cheyenne had decided to relieve herself on my mama's new rug. That was it. This varmint was dead. I tightened my fists and attacked the horse with both arms swinging, but the horse was quicker than me and the only thing I hit was the pile of manure. Covered in horse waste, I could hear Daddy's pickup coming up the drive, and I knew I was in really deep crap.

Needless to say, my butt was punished on that Sunday afternoon. My brothers both laughed at me for the next three weeks while they got to ride Cheyenne. I asked the Johnson children about the Rosenberry flu they caught this time last year. They said the only thing they got last year was a blistered butt for sneaking out their daddy's fishing boat. The Rosenberry flu story seems to make great conversation when Mama has company over.

Illustrator: Roy Carter

Cow's in the House

Matthew Lambert

"Ain't that cattle," yelled out Bubba, my brother-in-law's brother. I got mad. It was all his fault that this whole mess got started in the first place. It all started yesterday evening, when I caught him trying to get into the pasture. I tried to get him to stop, but Joan, the sister who married into that batch of idiots talked me into it. Lord, as soon as Bubba left, she called me a dumbass for letting him spotlight on our property. "Only be a couple of hours," he said. When I came out this morning, he started to open the gate to get out, coveralls caked in mud, spotlight in one hand, rifle cradled in a position pointing at the house, and not one square-inch of hunter's orange on him at all, and remember it ain't deer season yet. I wanted to cuss him out, right then and there, and then I remembered about 'Big Bubba's Short Temper' and he had the gun. So I let that class A dummy into the house. After what seemed hours of hearing about the one he almost got, I went outside just to be alone. Then out of the corner of my eye, I see them; two calves had gotten out of the pasture. I got Bubba, and as we tried to catch one and carry it back into the pasture. Guess-who almost tripped and scared it away. The calves ran into the yard. We tried to catch up with them, but before we could do anything, both of the calves had slipped into the house through the door he left open. When we got inside, I blurted out, "Cow's in the house," and this moron, the cause of all of these problems, said,"Ain't that cattle?" I wondered if a jury anywhere in the world would convict me if I killed that dumbass for correcting my grammar at a time like this. Well an hour later, we had finally gotten those two calves in the pasture and closed the gate. Then Bubba left and I got to work on the inside. When Joan came up I started to let her have a cussing that had been in me since Bubba walked out of the pasture, but before I got two words out she said, " I didn't let him in there last night." So I finished up, putting tables and chairs right, throwing away the completely destroyed, and that is when you came up. So think of that before you say a damn word about the mud in this house.

Illustrator: Garth Henry

Another Fine Mess

Corey Hux

"Sir? Sir! This is the last time I'm gonna tell you. This is a barroom, not a motel. Now, I'm not telling you again. We're closed. Go your ass home!"

With no response from the man except for a pitiful groan, Jake walked away and resumed his job of picking up crushed beer cans and broken ashtrays. He turned and looked again at the man passed out at the bar.

"Stupid drunks. I can't stand any of 'em."

The man raised his head to take the last swallow out of his mug then plopped his head back on the bar. Jake took the mug and washed it out. He knew the man drank far too much, far too fast that night. Jake wasn't the kind of bartender to remember what and how much everybody drank, but he couldn't help remembering this man's poison.

Jake had only been working in the bar for about six months. There wasn't a whole lot to the place, just the usual barroom stuff. A couple of round tables, twelve or thirteen stools surrounding the bar, three pool tables, a pinball machine, a dartboard, a jukebox, and a few scattered posters of half-naked models wearing Budweiser bikinis covering only the bare essentials.

Because the bar was located on the Louisiana side of the Mississippi River, it generally attracted two types of crowds. The most common crowd consisted of the nasty old fishermen who wobbled through the door smelling like rotten fish bait wearing old rugged jeans, rubber boots, and caps with snappy little sayings like, "My wife said if I go fishing one more time, she's gonna leave me. I sure will miss her." Most of these men generally sat at the bar for hours on end drinking draft beer and telling lies about the one that got away.

The second crowd consisted of people who fell in the age range where it's legal to drink alcohol in the Bayou State but not in the rest of the continental United States. Most of these people drove down from Mississippi, but occasionally one or two would slip in from Texas or Tennessee to join the party.

That's how Jake landed his job. Any old Joe could pour beer in a glass. That's all the fishermen required. But the younger crowd demanded diversity. These kids wanted drinks like Kamikazes, Screwdrivers, Hurricanes, Fuzzy Navels, White Russians, and the list just goes on forever. And Jake could handle it all. He was the mixed drink master.

He read numerous books on the contents of mixed drinks before applying for the job, and he was quite the bartender. His friends called him Cocktail after the movie debuted. He would be the first to admit he looked nothing like Tom Cruise, but he didn't mind the nickname. He even liked it at times.

The bar remained fairly quiet until just before the strange man walked in. Just a couple of the usuals gulping beer and telling lies. Then the crowd stormed in. It always happened about the same time everyday, just before dusk after it turned too dark to fish. Cocktail was too busy slinging mugs of foamy beer and collecting

tips to notice the man at first, but then the entire bar got quiet. Everyone turned to the door staring at the man. He definitely wasn't one of the usuals. Gray pinstriped suit, suspenders showing, briefcase under his arm, slick gray hair, and thin gold-rimmed glasses. He made his way to the last stool on the right side of the bar, placed the briefcase on the floor between his legs, and lit a cigarette with a bright gold Zippo lighter bearing the monogram reading "DAH." Everyone tried not to stare at him, but it didn't work out very well. He didn't pay much attention to them. He just motioned for Cocktail to come over.

"What can I get for you tonight, sir?"

Cocktail already had the idea that the man would order a glass of champagne or gin and tonic or some other yuppie drink like that, but he was wrong.

"I'll have a Flaming Dr. Pepper, son."

Cocktail backed up one step and looked at the man in disgust. He'd been stumped. For the first time since he'd worked at the Briar Patch someone ordered a drink he couldn't fix.

Cocktail reached down, grabbed a chilled beer mug, reached in the fridge, and grabbed a Dr. Pepper. He popped the tab on the can, filled the mug, grabbed the man's cigarette resting on the lip of the ashtray, and dropped it in the drink.

"That'll be seven bucks. You'd better drink up before it stops flaming, sir."

The man cocked his head to the side and glared at Cocktail.

"You don't have to be a smartass, son. I know you've probably never heard of the drink, but I can easily tell you how to fix it."

Cocktail took the Dr. Pepper with the cigarette butt floating in it away and wiped the bar. He slammed a fresh mug in front of the man.

"All right, amaze me."

"O.K. First, you have to fill the glass two-thirds of the way full with beer."

Cocktail grabbed the mug filling it with beer. He put it back in front of the man waiting for the next wave of instructions.

"Now, take a shot glass, jigger size if you have it, and fill it one-third full of 151 rum, one third full of Everclear, and one-third full of Bacardi rum."

Cocktail followed the rest of the instructions then put the shotglass down right beside the beer. The man thanked Cocktail then lit another cigarette. He took a deep drag without ever extinguishing the flame on the Zippo. He rested the cigarette on the lip of the ashtray and waved the lighter near the rim of the shot glass setting the concoction of liquors on fire. Cocktail started to say something, but before he had the chance the man had already picked up the shot glass, dropped it in the beer, and downed the entire drink. The shot glass made a sharp pinging sound as it settled from his lips back into the bottom of the mug. Everyone watched out of curiosity including Cocktail who stood with his mouth opened wide. He'd never seen anyone drink anything that fast. He couldn't drink water that fast much less foamy beer mixed with rum and corn whiskey. The man wiped his upper lip with a silk handkerchief.

"Now that's just what the doctor ordered. Keep 'em coming."

"Whoa, hold on just one damn minute. How'd you learn to drink like that?"

"Thirty-five years of experience, son. Maybe you'll be that fast when you grow

up. Now, keep 'em coming."

Cocktail shrugged his shoulders and filled the mug and the shot glass again. By this time everyone in the barroom was curious. One old fisherman called Cocktail to the corner opposite the strange man.

"Hey, boy. What's that feller over there drankin' on?"

"A Flamin' Dr. Pepper. Have you ever heard such?"

"Why don't you throw me one of them thangs together. That looks all right."

Cocktail was shocked at the old fisherman's request. That man had been coming in the bar everyday faithfully ever since Cocktail worked there, and he's never ordered anything but Schlitz the entire time. But Cocktail didn't argue. He fixed the drink, pulled out his lighter, and set the alcohol on fire. The old man grabbed the mug and turned it up. He drank much slower and sloppier than the strange man. About half the drink ran down his neck into his overalls. He swallowed the last few sips and slammed the mug down on the bar.

"Whoo!! Mister, that's a damn good drank. Tastes just like them soda pops my boy dranks all the time."

The stranger put his cigarette out.

"Yes, sir. I know. That's where the name comes from. If you drink it fast enough, it tastes just like a Dr. Pepper. But be careful. It's strong. It'll put you flat on your behind before you know what's happened. Believe me, I know."

The fisherman ordered another drink, and the curiosity soon surrounded the bar. Everyone had to have a Flaming Dr. Pepper. Cocktail just shook his head and laughed. He thought for sure when he saw the man walk in the bar he would leave with an ass whipping, but here he stood, man of the hour.

But now the bar was closed and the only person left in the bar was this strange man passed out. Cocktail was finished with his cleanup. He was tired and ready to go home. He walked back toward the man again mumbling.

"Tell everybody else to be careful, and you're the only one that can't walk out of here by yourself. Mister! Hey! I've got to go. Please get up and leave. I'd hate to have to call the police to come put you in the drunk tank, but if you don't get up I won't have any other choice."

The man raised his head and looked at Cocktail.

"Police?"

"Yes, sir. If you won't leave I'm going to have to call the police. I'm going to use the restroom. If you're not gone when I get back, I'm going to have to have you locked up."

Cocktail walked away to the restroom. He did his business then looked in the mirror. Suddenly this horrible smell hit him right in the face. He looked down into the sink. It was filled with vomit. He held his breath turning the water on full-blast.

"Nasty drunks. I wonder if they do such as that at home."

He took a handful of papertowels and wiped the rest of the vomit that the water didn't flush away. He threw the napkins in the garbage, washed his hands, and walked back into the bar. The man wasn't there. Cocktail smiled and let out a sigh of relief. He grabbed his jacket and started turning the lights off when he noticed something out of the corner of his eye. The man left the briefcase on the floor.

Cocktail shook his head.

"I don't know why I work here. These people would leave their asses if they weren't tied on."

He picked up the briefcase, turned off the lights, and headed out the door. The parking lot seemed deserted. Most of the time there were cars all over the place, but tonight only one car stood in the shadows: the old orange Pinto. Cocktail never really liked the way his car looked, but it always got him where he needed to go, so he couldn't complain. He unlocked the door and threw the briefcase in the back seat.

Cocktail didn't think much about the briefcase during the thirty minute drive back home. He barely kept his eyes open for the drive. He sipped on a day-old Mountain Dew and furiously smoked Marlboros to keep him alert. He started thinking about the next day. Cocktail thought about the algebra test he would surely fail. Then he thought about the light bill that he couldn't afford to pay. He wanted to call home and ask for a little help, but his pride wouldn't let him. He knew exactly what his mother would say. It was always the same thing.

"Jake, this is another fine mess you've gotten yourself into. When are you going to grow up, son?"

Cocktail tried to put all the problems out of his mind. He drove all the way down the levee to his home in a little town everyone called Deer Park. There wasn't much to the house. Basically a wood-finished design surrounded by cheap green vinyl siding suspended fifteen feet in the air to protect it from the mighty Mississippi during flood times. Cocktail loved to see the water get high and treacherous. He'd never lived in a place where the scenery could change so fast. One day he might take a stroll through the front yard, and the next day he may have to swim through it.

Cocktail had kept up with the river stages for the past couple of days. River stages meant life or death to the locals. He knew the river flooded at 46.9 feet, and at that point the river stood at 42.1 feet rising six inches everyday. The Mississippi was always unpredictable though. Cocktail knew it might jump up those last four or five feet overnight. It had happened many times before. It seemed like habit to him to wake up in the middle of the night to see the car covered past the doors in water. He knew that he needed to drive the car to the levee and walk back to his house. But the hour grew late, and Cocktail was tired. He just couldn't bring himself to walk that mile back from the levee. Everyone else had already headed for higher ground with their vehicles. Within a matter of less than a week people would be forced to ride through their yards and across the lake in a fourteen-foot fishing boat. Cocktail knew it was inevitable. He thought about it for a minute but decided he would take the risk.

Cocktail made his way up the sixteen wooden steps leading to his front door. Sugar, Cocktail's Pekingnese, heard the steps creaking and began scratching at the door. He could hear her pitiful little whimpering as if she were saying, "If you don't let me out this door, I'm going to piss all over the floor!"

Sugar was quite the lady. She practiced a high form of doggie etiquette. She never left any little surprise packages around the house, and she wouldn't eat regular

dog food if her life depended on it. She ate only steak and bologna and things of that sort. She even ate carrots, yogurt, and strawberries that other dogs would never even consider. But the fault rested with only one person: Cocktail. She had been a gift from his parents. Someone to keep him company when he went off to college, and he spoiled her rotten. She ate sometimes when Cocktail didn't even have the money to feed himself. Her favorite was fish, which was fortunate for her since Cocktail lived on the river and went fishing every Saturday.

She turned out to be quite the little fisherman herself. All Cocktail had to do was put the hook in the water and relax. He could study or read a book or whatever he wanted. Sugar watched the cork for him and whenever it went under water she barked and stood up on her hind legs. She even sometimes let out a little doggy smile when the fish landed in the boat. Then she would fight the fish while he flopped about the bottom of the boat. She was a very intelligent dog. Sugar was more than just a dog; she was a friend: Cocktail's best friend.

Cocktail fumbled his keys for a moment before finally finding the one that fit the door. He opened it quickly and Sugar darted out onto the porch, down the steps, onto the grass and quickly squatted to relieve herself. She seemed very particular about where she took care of business. Many times Cocktail drove to the store with her and let her out of the car to use the bathroom. She would walk around for thirty minutes looking for the perfect spot. And it always had to be a grassy spot where no one could see what she'd done. Sugar raced back up the steps into the door and jumped on the couch. Cocktail sat down beside her and turned the television on. He rubbed her on the head.

"Girl? Did you wipe"

He laughed to himself and kicked off his shoes. As he lit a cigarette he noticed the theme music for the newscast blare over the television set. He looked up to see the news anchorman sitting at his desk. A picture came up in the background. He couldn't believe it. The picture was of the man he'd run out of the bar. The anchorman spoke.

"Good evening. This is a Channel Four news update. After a two week search over three states, CEO Darren Alfred Hailey has been located. Hailey was involved in a car accident about thirty minutes ago. He was pronounced dead on the scene. Police are still combing the area for the leather briefcase believed to contain the $2.5 million in embezzled funds from the Amerinet Corporation. We'll keep you informed as more news develops in this late-breaking story."

Cocktail turned off the television and raced out the door. He opened the door of his car and glanced around to make sure no one was looking. Grabbing the briefcase, he ran back into the house. Cocktail took a butcher knife and pried the locks on the briefcase until they were free. He opened the briefcase and looked inside. Sitting back on the couch, he looked at Sugar.

"Well, this is another fine mess we've gotten ourselves into."

notes